VARIATIONS IN SOCIOECONOMIC TRAJECTORIES, 1980 TO 2010:

THE BLACK AMERICA STORY

by

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ABSTRACT

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by

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In the decades since the Civil Rights Movement, scholars have studied the changing economic and social status of Black Americans to see whether the promise of racial equality is being fulfilled. Focusing on the period from 1980 to 2010, this dissertation examines three themes that emerge from this literature. It compares the trajectories over time of different groups of Black Americans according to age, gender, and U.S.- versus foreign-born status. It follows the fortunes of these different groups over time, measured by income, poverty status, educational attainment, home ownership, employment, and labor force participation. It uses data from the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the United States Census Bureau's 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census, and 2008-10 (3-year cross-sectional data) American Community Survey (ACS). This study uses synthetic age cohort analysis to test and apply theories of cultural and social capital and social stratification within the Black population over time.

This dissertation concludes with individual- and group-level policy suggestions.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender and Nativity in Black Americans

Social scientific research has focused for decades on the relationship between the relatively poor economic conditions that have plagued the Black population and the lingering effects of systematic oppression and discrimination it experienced under the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow. These institutions held Black Americans as second-class citizens and enforced that status by severely limiting Black opportunities for advancement, leaving large portions of this population to live in destitution and cycles of poverty. Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended segregation in schools and the workplace, creating new opportunities for Blacks to improve their socioeconomic standing, much effort has been devoted to bring Black Americans into parity with Whites. Efforts at achieving parity have mainly been attempted through governmental programs, assistance, and research aimed at discovering and addressing the factors that promote and exacerbate inequality with Whites.

These efforts, however, have produced a narrative of public consciousness and discourse of Black socioeconomic standing that presents its development as having a singular trajectory and endpoint. Even as Black Americans have enjoyed economic success and growth and the Black middle class has developed and expanded, there has been an identification of Blackness with poverty. This view of Black Americans is so pervasive that political opponents have referred to President Barack Obama, a person of considerable socioeconomic means, as “The Food Stamp President.” This monolithic view of Black Americans, while helpful at one time, is

now problematic because it ignores Black socioeconomic variation and diversity, creating a disconnect between what are perceived to be the needs of Black Americans and the reality of their opportunities and deficiencies. This disconnect remains a problem in understanding the important roles that gender and nativity status have had in shaping Black economic outcomes in the decades since the Civil Rights Act. To adequately and accurately address Black socioeconomic issues and increase the knowledge of this population, research must take into account the diversity of Black American experiences.

Gender in the Black community has been the subject of much scrutiny, primarily with regard to poverty. The images of the Black "welfare queen" and Black dependence on public assistance are pervasive in American consciousness and political dialogues. The perception of Black socioeconomic development in relation to gender has largely been one of dependency, whereas the reality has been of struggle and independence. Until recently, Black women have been in the workforce in much greater numbers than their White counterparts because Black men's incomes had to be supplemented. Black women's work made up for the wage and employment discrimination that Black men experience, and there was a high demand for domestic servitude, which Black women filled (Katz, Stern, & Fader, 2005 p. 85). Therefore, it is conceivable that Black women's equally long presence in the workforce has similarly shaped the socioeconomic development of Black men and women, but it can also be argued that the forces of gender politics and inequality have given Black women an economic trajectory divergent from Black men.

Except for a relatively small number of studies about the socioeconomic success of West Indian and African immigrants, nativity status has largely been absent from the Black American narrative. This gap is particularly evident given the amount of research that has been dedicated to

studies of the socioeconomic development of Hispanic and Asian immigrants in the United States. The trend has been to treat Black Americans as monolithic because of their overarching racial identity and characteristics, especially with respect to their social mobility. As is the case with gender, however, the argument can be made that the influx of Black immigrants to the United States created yet another avenue of socioeconomic development for Black Americans. The evidence for this fracturing of the Black population by nativity status can be seen in the Black middle-class growth, which has been disproportionately driven by foreign-born Black Americans, particularly from the Caribbean and Africa (Attewell et al., 2004).

The overarching point of this discussion is that while the discourse about Black socioeconomic development has largely been presented as monolithic, there is evidence to suggest that Black trajectories for social mobility have been divergent in recent decades. The focus of this dissertation, then, is to ascertain whether Black socioeconomic trajectories have diverged in recent years. This dissertation also illustrates the differing patterns of socioeconomic development among Black sub-populations.

Contributions to the Field

This dissertation fills a need for studies that recognize the diversity of the Black population. It focuses on the social mobility patterns of Black sub-populations (e.g., Black women or foreign-born Blacks) throughout the life span and over time. Its contribution to the field of sociology is two-fold: (1) it adds detail and cohesion to existing knowledge about Black American social mobility, and (2) it fills gaps in knowledge about a group frequently overlooked by research – foreign-born Black Americans.

Research has already shown that Black women face greater economic struggles than Black men. In fact, studies have found that Black women earn lower incomes (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2012; Bowman, 2010), own homes at lower rates (Collins & Margo, 2001), and live in poverty at greater rates than Black men (Laseter, 1997; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Albrecht, 2000; Ezeala-Harrison, 2010). Research about Black men and women's social mobility, however, has focused on comparing them to White men. This dissertation builds upon what prior research has found by directly comparing change among Black men and women for several socioeconomic indicators throughout the life course *and* over a period of three decades. What this analysis adds, then, is greater depth and span to research about Black socioeconomic experiences in the United States. Further, the results of this dissertation grounds different sociological theories of social inequality, race, and gender with empirical research that either supports or refutes their assertions.

With regard to nativity status and Black social mobility, little research has focused on how foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks *compare* on different socioeconomic indicators. Instead, prior research has shown that foreign-born Blacks tend to fare well economically in the United States. They tend to have incomes almost equal to Whites (Logan & Deane, 2003; Model, 2011), have high educational attainment (Rong & Brown, 2001; Attewell, 2004), and high employment rates (Model, 2011). Black immigrants are often considered the most successful segment of the Black population. Therefore, this analysis adds to prior research findings by directly comparing U.S.- and foreign-born Blacks on socioeconomic indicators over thirty years and throughout their life spans.

Finally, the contribution of this dissertation comes from its ability to generate research that improves upon this study and produces further knowledge. Given that gender and nativity status have emerged as significant factors in Black socioeconomic development, this body of research is likely to continue to grow and develop.

Organization of the Dissertation

The focus of this dissertation is the development of social mobility in the Black American population. The research questions guiding this analysis aim to uncover, among other things, whether some groups within in the Black population are becoming increasingly prosperous while others are stagnating or deteriorating in terms of income, poverty, and education. Further, this study aims to discover whether younger Black American cohorts fare better or worse economically than older Black cohorts fared at the same point in the life span. Finally, this dissertation illustrates whether Black women have developed further economically than Black men, and if foreign-born Blacks outpace U.S.-born Blacks in socioeconomic development. As a result, this dissertation employs a synthetic age cohort analysis to analyze the three most recent decades of census data and compare these groups over time. This analysis therefore examines whether Black American socioeconomic trajectories have been diverging or developing similarly over time.

One possibility is that the data from this analysis may reveal different socioeconomic trajectories for Black American sub-populations throughout the decades under study. The counter-hypothesis is that despite important material inequalities along the lines of class, gender, education, and nativity, each Black sub-population has been suffering similar economic setbacks in recent decades, causing the Black middle class's economic rise to falter and producing a convergence among sub-groups of the Black population. The latter hypothesis would suggest that it is still meaningful to talk about *a* socioeconomic trajectory of Black America.

To examine the development of Black American social mobility, this dissertation proceeds along the following course. First, a theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting Black socioeconomic trajectories presented. These theories include analyses of the

roles of race, class, gender, and nativity status in obtaining the resources necessary for social mobility. The next chapter includes a review of the literature on Black American home ownership, college completion, income, labor force participation, employment, and poverty status. This literature review details what prior research has found regarding Black social mobility in the study period and identifies relevant study designs and samples. Following the literature review is a discussion of the methodology used to perform this analysis –datasets used, variables chosen, and statistical analyses performed.

The chapter following the methodology section details the results of the synthetic age cohort analysis for each variable by sub-population (Black men, Black women, foreign-born Blacks, and U.S.-born Blacks), organized by the relative socioeconomic development of each group. A review of the results of this analysis in the context of prior findings and theoretical concepts follows the results chapter. This section details which findings from this analysis support or refute the findings of previous studies and how these findings fit into the theoretical models outlined in this chapter. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the important findings of the analysis, identifies the limitations of the current research, and details the sociopolitical implications of this study as well as directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories frame this analysis of the socioeconomic trajectories of Black Americans. These theories focus on the effects of race and class on the Black population's ability to acquire social, cultural, and human capital. According to Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1983, p.

249). In other words, social capital refers to the networks and relationships that people build, which aid them in obtaining resources such as access to employment.

Cultural capital is the different forms of knowledge, training, skills, and education that allow a person to become upwardly socioeconomically mobile (Bourdieu 1990). For example, a parent's ability to provide such opportunities as after-school classes, foreign language lessons, and standardized test prep are important forms of cultural capital that promote educational attainment.

Social and cultural capital are important to this analysis because the (in)ability to generate sufficient capital to become upwardly mobile can cause the Black population's economic development to stagnate. On the other hand, the ability of sub-groups to obtain more capital is reflected in their divergent economic development. In other words, these concepts provide a framework on which to base this dissertation's hypotheses.

Both of Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital are important components for the attainment of human capital, or the benefits people can use (e.g., college education) to produce economic capital. Gary Becker's *Human Capital* (1964) explained the divergent patterns in the Black America population by highlighting how individuals, weighing costs and benefits through a cultural lens, make decisions to invest in human capital. His research weighed the impact of both positive and negative habits and their effect on human capital and the resulting macroeconomic implications. In regards to Black Americans, Becker's theory aids in understanding that U.S.- and foreign-born Blacks place different values on varying types of human capital.

Utilizing Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, therefore, this discussion examines the literature on how race and class inhibit or boost Black Americans' ability to

acquire different forms of capital. Furthermore, this discussion examines the roles that gender and nativity status play in influencing which segments of the Black population generate more or less capital and whether they have similar socioeconomic development patterns.

More specifically, this discussion focuses on the concept of the primacy of class versus race as detailed in William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* and Charles Willie's response to Wilson in the *Inclining Significance of Race*. Furthermore, this section examines the interaction of race and class as well as gender and nativity status through Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. These theories are each grounded in the idea that social structures (e.g., gender, race, and nativity status) are important factors in social inequality and socioeconomic development.

The first theoretical concept that this discussion explores is the role that race and class play in the development of Black socioeconomic status. Theorists have differed on the significance that racial identification versus other factors, most importantly race, has had on the Black economic development. These theories are critical for this analysis because they illustrate how Black access to capital is limited.

In William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), he argued that although race was a significant determinant of Black Americans' life chances in the pre-industrial period, from the industrial period onward, class has been a more important determinant of an individual Black life chances. Arguing for the primacy of class over race, Wilson made the case that it is not being Black that (dis)advantages Black Americans, it is their position in the class system that grants or denies them access to socioeconomic resources. Given Bourdieu's framework, this theory is a plausible explanation for the socioeconomic development of Black American sub-populations in the last three decades. Because access to social and cultural capital

is limited by socioeconomic status rather than race, low-status Blacks will have much less access to capital and therefore much lower chances of becoming upwardly mobile. This theory is also supported by the findings of research highlighting the economic well-being of Black immigrants. These groups do not appear to be barred from economic success by their race, which supports the idea that socioeconomic status is a more significant determinant of life chances.

Responding to Wilson's assertion that class trumps race as a determining factor of socioeconomic mobility for Black Americans, Charles V. Willie argued in *The Inclining Significance of Race* (1978) that the significance of race for Blacks has actually increased because of programs such as affirmative action, which have placed Black Americans in extended contact with Whites for the first time. This extended contact is especially the case for middle-class Black Americans, who are well positioned to enter formerly White institutions. Willie's perspective also makes sense in the context of Bourdieu's theories about social and cultural capital and the historical socioeconomic disadvantage of Black Americans. Because Black Americans have historically been denied access to the forms of capital that would allow them to become upwardly mobile, they continue to lack various forms of capital, a reality exacerbated by contemporary racial discrimination. Furthermore, that even socioeconomically successful Black Americans are vulnerable to economic threats such as downward mobility (Attewell, 2004) at least partially supports the contention that race is a significant determinant of life chances for Black Americans. The question arises, since race and class are so closely related in the United States whether either *alone* can be a significant determinant of life chances for Black Americans.

Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (2000) briefly discussed the interaction of race and class. He contended that race *shapes* class in America. As a result, for Black Americans, class is inextricably tied to race, such that regardless

of life experience, Black Americans experience similar boundaries to and opportunities for economic development. Robinson's conception of the interaction of race and class acknowledged both factors' effect on Black access to resources. Wilson and Willie's perspectives are important, but to point to race or class as being more significant ignores the effect that one has on the other.

Another theory that further highlights the interaction of race and class for Black Americans is Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, which details how different forms of social structures influence a person's experience of oppression. This theory focuses primarily on social inequality and oppression but can also be adapted for understanding how race and class interact to promote or inhibit access to capital resources. Crenshaw (1989) argued that different forms of oppression intersect to disadvantage members of minority populations. For instance, the experience of being both Black (a racial minority) and a woman (a gender minority) places Black women at a greater disadvantage than Black men who are only racial minorities. Applied to this discussion of Black social mobility, intersectionality illustrates how differential access to cultural and social capital causes Black socioeconomic trajectories to diverge. For example, Black women's dual minority status may prevent them from achieving a similar socioeconomic status as Black men. As a result, Black women's ability to attain capital or to utilize existing capital effectively for social mobility is hindered. Further, the use of intersectionality in the dissertation is driven by theory instead of data.

Finally, another theoretical concept can provide greater insight into how nativity status affects the socioeconomic development of Black Americans. The theoretical concept of immigration selection is centered on nativity status and is critical for exploring the socioeconomic trajectories of U.S.- and foreign-born Blacks. Selection is the process by which immigrants are chosen for entry into a destination country, in this case, the United States. This

concept holds pre-immigration levels of social and human capital explain certain immigrant groups' socioeconomic success because those immigrants who eventually are accepted into the United States and immigrate tend already to possess high levels of social and human capital. This means that foreign-born status would actually benefit Black immigrants since they already possess more capital due to their relatively well-off position. Foreign-born Blacks collectively have higher socioeconomic development when they enter the United States than U.S.-born Blacks.

The theories outlined above provide only a framework on which to build the basis of this analysis. The next chapter delves more deeply into the findings of earlier studies on the last three decades of social mobility for Black women and men and for foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks. Finally, through a detailed review of the literature, this dissertation provides a clearer understanding of how gender and nativity status are related to the socioeconomic indicators utilized in this analysis.

Chapter 2

LITTERATURE REVIEW

Statement of the Problem

Eugene Robinson began his 2010 book *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* with the following claim:

> There was a time when there were agreed-upon "black leaders," when there was a clear "black agenda," when we could talk confidently about "the state of black America" – but not anymore. Not after decades of desegregation, affirmative action, and urban decay; not after globalization decimated the working class and trickle-down economics sorted the nation into winners and losers; not after the biggest wave of black immigration from Africa and the Caribbean since slavery… These are among the forces and trends that have had the unintended consequence of tearing black America to pieces.

The notion that parts of the Black population are on very different social and economic trajectories – if not actually torn apart – formed the argument in William Julius Wilson's 1978 book *The Declining Significance of Race* and has stimulated waves of research on the so-called "Black Underclass." The same belief has informed studies of the growing Black middle class and research on Black immigrants and their offspring.

This dissertation tests these ideas about the divergent socioeconomic trajectories of different groups of the Black population by analyzing the three most recent decades of census data and comparing these groups over time. Are some Black groups going from strength to strength, while others are stagnating or even sliding backwards in terms of income, education, and poverty? Are recent age cohorts of Black Americans faring better or worse than older cohorts when they were at the same point in the life cycle? Have Black women made more

economic progress than Black men? Are foreign-born Blacks economically outpacing native-born Blacks? These are the empirical questions that form the core of this project. Based on these findings, this dissertation returns to these theories about the splintering of Black America and intersectionality to assess whether they provide an accurate understanding of the recent experiences of Black Americans.

One possibility is that data will show different socioeconomic trajectories between groups over time. The counter-hypothesis is that despite important material inequalities along the lines of class, gender, education, and nativity, each Black sub-population has been suffering similar economic setbacks in recent decades, causing the Black middle class's economic rise to falter and producing a convergence among sub-groups of the Black population. This second scenario would imply that it is still meaningful to talk about *a* socioeconomic trajectory of Black America.

Literature Review

Social scientists have documented the extent of Black American socioeconomic mobility, barriers, and disadvantages they face. This extensive literature includes authoritative reports by the National Research Council (1990), retrospective analyses of Black progress (Clayton 1996), and yearly updates from the National Urban League's "State of Black America," as well as numerous monographs and articles by individual scholars.

Three topics have recurred. First, scholars have documented the continuing existence of racial discrimination, especially in employment and in earnings (Moss and Tilly 2003; Landry and Marsh 2011; Pager 2007; Pager and Grodsky 2001; Pager and Quillian 2005; Pager et al. 2009). Second, researchers have emphasized the economic vulnerability of

Black families. Third, with high rates of unemployment and job displacement, scholars have paid particular attention to the Black middle class and its relationship[to housing market issues, including the proliferation of subprime mortgages and home foreclosures (Bowser, 2006; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Rivera 2008).

Home Ownership

Existing research has indicated that home ownership is one of the most important facets of wealth-building, transmission of assets between generations, and social mobility for American families of all statuses (Adams, 1987; Gans, 1988; Scanlon, 1998; Di, 2001; Boehm & Schlottman, 2004). Home ownership is also regarded as an important step in the life cycles of Americans and is a signifier of social status attainment (Rudel, 1987). Finally, home ownership creates strong ties to community and encourages the social and economic growth of neighborhoods. As such, research on Black home ownership is crucial for gauging the level of economic health in the population as a whole and in its various sub-populations. Furthermore, taken with other economic indicators, Black American's level of home ownership measures the degree of parity with White Americans that has been achieved thus far.

Many factors are conducive to increased home ownership within populations, including higher educational attainment, high incomes, and occupational prestige. In addition, demographic factors such as gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity influence the probability of home ownership. As such, these factors are an important basis of analysis for the survey of home ownership in Black America.

Studies focused on the rates and characteristics of Black home ownership have found a persistent racial disparity between Blacks and Whites. For instance, research has shown that

rates of home ownership for both Blacks and Whites increased from the years 1970 to 2000, when over half of Black Americans (55.62%) and over three-quarters of Whites (77.92%) owned their own homes (Sykes, 2008 p. 261). Despite these gains, however, the rate of Black home ownership has consistently remained roughly 70% of Whites' over the three decade period (p. 262). Some researchers have shown that this racial gap in home ownership persists at all socioeconomic levels (Charles & Hurst, 2001 p. 18). Other studies have also found similar disparities in the rates of home ownership between Blacks and Whites over time (Freeman, 2005; Sedo & Kossoudji, 2004) and across social classes (Horton, 1992; Crowder, 2011). Researchers have explained the persistence of the disparity by the residual effects of past racism, discriminatory practices in the housing market, personal financial responsibilities, and class differences.

Many studies have focused on the particular challenges that Black people face in becoming home owners and keeping their homes. They conclude that the root cause of the inequality is racial discrimination in the housing market. In 1992, Hayward Horton found that Black Americans were *half* as likely to become home owners as Whites, even when factors such as education, income, and labor force participation were held constant (p. 483-484). Given the strength of the difference for each variable, he surmised that the gap in home ownership rates between the races was attributable to discrimination (p. 484). Based on his findings, and in opposition to William Julius Wilson's thesis, he concluded that "class does not supersede race in the area of wealth accumulation," (p. 488).

Nearly twenty years later, Hall and Crowder (2011) came to similar conclusions about the importance of race in homeownership despite that Black home ownership had grown to *two-thirds* that of Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Their analysis focused on the

relationship between extended family resources and home ownership. They found that limited wealth and greater levels of poverty in the extended family left Black renters without the necessary resources to transition into home ownership (p. 1540-1541). Moreover, their results showed that the racial disparity in home ownership remained even when extended family wealth and poverty were controlled for. Whites with limited extended family resources had a probability of home ownership similar to that of Blacks with much greater means (p. 1544). As a result, the authors concluded that due to redlining, discrimination in lending markets, and other forms of discrimination the prospects of transitioning into home ownership for all but the wealthiest Black Americans were greatly limited (p. 1545).

In contrast, other researchers have highlighted the interaction of social forces and the accountability of Black individuals in the struggle to become home owners. A 2007 study of Black and White renters' Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) found that Black Americans tended to save less money toward their homes and saved less frequently than did Whites. In fact, the study's results showed that, although Black and White participants did not differ significantly on reported income (Weiss et al., 2007 p. 668), Black participants in the study saved an average of $14.40 a month, whereas White participants saved an average of $20.50 a month. Further, Black participants only made deposits to their IDAs in 43% of the study months, compared to 53% for White participants (p. 669). This disparity in savings behavior simultaneously reflects the lack of resources available to Black Americans and differential financial commitment to home ownership. Their behavior may partially explain why, when they actually do become home owners, Black people tend to buy homes in metropolitan neighborhoods and own homes of lesser value than Whites (Sykes, 2008; Flippen, 2010).

Further illustrating the difficulties that Black people face in becoming home owners, other researchers have demonstrated that Black Americans take longer to transition into first-time home ownership and exit out of home ownership at higher rates than Whites (Dawkins, 2005; Rivera, 2008; Turner & Smith, 2009). In particular, Turner and Smith (2009) found that Black home owners are most vulnerable to exit in the first three years of owning their homes, after which the rates of home ownership stabilize (p. 14-15). These findings, combined with the discrimination and lack of resources highlighted by Horton and Hall and Crowder, paint a picture of Black home ownership in the United States as fraught with challenges and the potential for failure.

In addition, more recent studies have indicated that much of the earlier research on the growth of Black homeownership rates is now out-of-date because the recent subprime mortgage crisis and subsequent waves of foreclosures have disproportionately affected Black homeowners (Rivera 2008; Immergluck, 2009; Rugh & Massey, 2010). According to U.S. Census data, Black home ownership peaked in 2004, with half of the Black population owning homes at that time. After the recession of 2008, however, that rate dropped to 45% (compared to 74% for Whites).

In contrast to research about the overall Black population, very little research has focused on Black gender differences in home ownership. A 1992 study by Alba and Logan, however, found that among Black Americans, married couples and households with children are more likely to own homes (p. 1326). Conversely, a 2007 study of single Black adults who live alone found evidence that such households (which they termed SALA - single adult, living alone) are increasingly present in the Black middle class and among Black home owners. These single adult households were also found to be nearly equally male and female (Marsh et

al., 2007). Finally, one study of the racial change in home ownership over the decades found that although Black women own a larger proportion of homes compared to White women, they consistently own fewer homes than Black men and their homes tend to be less valuable than Black men's (Collins & Margo, 2001).

Earlier research has also shown that there is great variation in home ownership among the Black population because of the rise of the Black middle class population and immigration from sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. These studies have shown that immigrant Black groups and their children either fare much better than or as well as native-born Black Americans in home ownership. For example, Logan and Deane's survey of the socioeconomic status of Black ethnic groups in the United States found that African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants live in neighborhoods with similar rates of home ownership as African-Americans (Logan & Deane, 2003 p. 10). Other studies have found that Black ethnic groups from Africa and the Caribbean have higher rates of home ownership and higher home values than native-born African-Americans (Rivera, 2008; Martin, 2009).

College Completion

College completion, like home ownership, is increasingly an important step in the life cycle of Americans. In the decades after the Civil Rights Act (1964) Black Americans have gained new opportunities for post-secondary education, and research has shown that earning a college diploma is positively correlated with higher income (Day & Newburger, 2002. Black Americans have been earning college diplomas at higher rates with each succeeding decade, but barriers remain, which prevent Black Americans from reaching educational parity with White Americans.

Research has shown that although Black Americans have been increasing their college completion rates since 1970, in recent years, the racial gap has grown larger. A 2004 study found that the racial gap in college completion rates widened from 7 percentage points in 1970 to over 12 in 2000 (Kodrzycki, 2004 p. 38). Moreover, the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education show that White Americans outpace Black Americans in earning college degrees by 20 percentage points (Devarics, 2011). Other studies have partially explained this racial disparity in college completion by illustrating that White Americans have outpaced Black Americans in earning undergraduate degrees. In other words, for a time, Black Americans were closing the gap simply by earning college degrees in higher numbers, but the disparity *increased* because Whites began earning a greater number of degrees faster than Blacks (McDaniel et al., 2010; Leach & Williams, 2007).

Consequently, much research has focused on which factors increase the rate of college completion in Black Americans. For instance, studies have shown that Black undergraduates are significantly more likely to receive degrees at institutions that they perceive to have less racist and discriminatory climates (Steele, 1997; Brown et al., 2005). These studies also found that most Black college students in the United States attend colleges with predominately White student bodies. Black student comfort at these institutions is instrumental in the retention of Black students and their ability to achieve there.

One important theory about increasing retention in Black college students posits that "formal social integration" with faculty members within and outside of classroom settings makes Black students feel more connected to and invested in their school and education (Leach & Williams, 2007 p. 47). In addition, a 1999 study by Wynetta Lee found that faculty mentoring of Black students is important, and that it increases Black student completion rates, regardless

of the race of the mentor (Lee, 1999 p. 37-38). Lee suggested that links to faculty members within students' chosen field are more important for Black students than having a mentor of the same race. As such, the author concluded that colleges and universities should train faculty members of all races to foster mentoring relationships with Black students (p. 40).

Finally, a study of motivators for completing college found that Black students who are from high socioeconomic status families, who have one or more college graduates in the family, and who have high levels of perceived social support are most likely to receive undergraduate degrees (Young et al. 2011). Therefore, it is clear that social supports such as parental involvement and connections with faculty play a large role in helping Black students transition into undergraduate study and for retaining Black students in colleges and universities.

Research has also shown that Black students at more selective institutions are more likely to obtain a college degree than those at less selective schools, but Black students most often attend less- or non- selective colleges. These studies have highlighted the role that resources at selective colleges play in fostering achievement in their students. For example, Melguizo (2008) found that the college completion rate for Black Americans at selective institutions (92%) was over 100% higher than that of non-selective schools (45%) (Melguizo, 2008 p. 225). Since a greater number of Black students are disadvantaged relative to Whites, however, more Black than White students attend colleges with less selective acceptance criteria (Flowers, 2007; Dickerson & Jacobs, 2006). Therefore, more Black students are entering institutions that likely have fewer resources to help retain them. To correct this disparity, Melguizo suggests that one way to increase college completion rates for Black Americans is to have more selective institutions increase recruitment of well-qualified Black applicants (Melguizo, 2008 p. 233).

Studies on Black college completion have revealed a large gender disparity; Black college graduates are predominately women. One analysis of the Black gender gap in college completion found that while American women in general have an advantage in college completion, this effect is magnified in the Black community with Black women outpacing Black men in earning undergraduate degrees for more than 70 years: "at no point [from 1940 onward] did a larger proportion of black men complete college than black women" (McDaniel et al., 2010 p. 892). In fact, according to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), nearly double the percentage of Black women graduate from college as Black men — 6.4% versus 3.3%, respectively (NCES, 2012). Further, Fortson (1997) has shown that Black men have some of the highest college attrition rates in the country.

Historically, the source of this gender disparity has been a lack of access to education and the resources to fund an education. For instance, between 1950 and 1980, segregation in the South limited the access that Black males had to universities at which they could utilize GI Bill funds to earn a college degree (McDaniel et al., 2010 p. 894). This inequality has continued in more recent times, with a large number of Black males dropping out of high school (and thus ineligible for college) or enrolling at institutions with low retention and college completion rates (p. 897). Finally, the mass incarceration of young, Black men of high school and college age creates a gender imbalance in the Black population for those who are available to enter college in the first place.

As is the case with home ownership, immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean illustrate that Black Americans have differing levels of resources and advantages. Theorists originally surmised that African and West Indian immigrants would suffer from a double barrier of being both Black and foreign-born, which would further hamper their access to educational

resources and thus educational attainment (Rong & Brown, 2001 p. 537, 544). Data do not bear this assumption out, though. Studies have found that African and West Indian immigrants outpace their native-born Black counterparts in completion of college degrees to the extent that Black immigrants and their offspring constitute a disproportionately large percentage of Black Americans with degrees. In fact, though Black immigrants comprise roughly only 10% of the total Black American population, they make up 16% of those who have completed undergraduate degrees (Attewell et al., p. 8).

In their study of Black Americans and the types of colleges they attend, Massey and associates found that although Black immigrants made up just 27% of the sample, they were greatly overrepresented in the most selective colleges and universities (Massey et al., 2007 p. 248). For example, at the 10 most selective institutions and at Ivy League schools, Black immigrants comprised 35.6% and 40.6% of the Black student population, respectively. In contrast, they comprise only 23.8% of the Black student population at the least selective schools (p. 248). Because more selective schools have been shown to increase the college completion rates of Black Americans, these results indicate that Black immigrants have an educational advantage over their native-born counterparts.

Furthermore, Rong and Brown (2001) showed that West Indian immigrants complete undergraduate degrees at higher rates than native-born African-Americans. Comparing the educational outcomes of African-American, European-American, and Caribbean-American students, the authors found that for the raw number of years of schooling completed educational attainment for Caribbean-American students outpaces even that of European-Americans (p. 548). Moreover, the results showed that Caribbean-American college completion rates (13.0%) are only slightly lower than that of Whites (14.3%) but much higher than African-Americans

(5.1%) (p. 551). The authors concluded that the effect of immigration may actually boost academic performance and college completion rather than hinder it for several reasons, including having greater motivation to succeed, better ability to use personal resources, and protection from the negative effects of racism through the development of an immigrant identity (p. 556).

Income

Most research on Black American incomes has focused on three themes: the wage gap between Black and White workers, the challenges that Black, low-income families face, and the expansion and struggles of the Black middle class. Earlier research has shown that most Black families are no longer poor. Instead, a rise in educational attainment and higher-paying jobs have translated into a rise in living standards for the majority of Black families. Because of this increase, it is pertinent that any survey of Black American incomes pay special focus on the Black middle class. In that vein, recent studies have shown that for Black families middle-class status is no protection against many of the same struggles that Black, low-income families face (e.g., discrimination and economic hardship and instability). In addition, a relatively new issue is that succeeding generations face the possibility of downward mobility (Patillo-McCoy, 2000; Attewell et al., 2004; Bowser, 2006).

In his book, *The Black Middle Class: Social Mobility – and Vulnerability*, Benjamin Bowser argued that middle-class Blacks face a particular vulnerability because they lack the history of intergenerational economic vitality that the White middle class has had. Indeed, the creation and expansion of the Black middle class is relatively recent. Further, he argued that the continuing role of racism and discrimination in shaping the Black middle class has

consistently undermined the security of middle-class status for Black Americans. As a result, the characteristics of the Black middle class do not match those of their White counterparts, and therefore the two middle classes cannot be approached with the same assumptions (Bowser, 2006).

Paul Attewell and his associates found the Black middle class economically vulnerable with native-born Black middle class children experiencing higher rates of downward mobility than their parents; they tend to achieve less academically than their parents, as well (Attewell et al., 2004 p. 17).

Patillo-McCoy's (2000) ethnography lent further support to these findings. In her study, Patillo-McCoy found that because of housing discrimination practices and lack of resources relative to Whites Black middle-class families tend to live in metropolitan areas that are in close proximity to lower-income, inner city neighborhoods. Consequently, Black middle-class children are exposed to lower-class lifestyles, which can lead them to emulate them and thus fail to surpass their parents' status. Moreover, Kochhar (2004) has shown that substantial wealth disparities relative to Whites leave middle-class Black Americans with fewer assets to bequeath to the next generation, which holds back upward mobility between generations. As a result, Attewell and associates found in their study that Black middle class youth face particular risks for being downwardly mobile relative to their parents.

Some of the difference between Black and White middle-class families can be traced to the fact that, on average, Black employees earn between 60% and 80% of what White workers earn (Western & Pettit, 2005; Kmec, 2003; Smith, 2000). Recent data show that the annual median income for Black families in 2008 was $34,218, whereas the median income for White families was $56,648. Further, the median weekly earnings for Whites in 2008 were $742,

compared to just $589 for Black workers (Bowman, 2010). In fact, studies have shown that income inequality for Black workers actually *increases* as occupational prestige increases. When Black men possess the same human capital as White men, they still earn between 11 and 21% less than White men (Grodsky & Pager, 2001 p. 552; Coleman, 2003 p. 899). These results are troubling because they indicate the continued presence in the work force of racial discrimination, which unfairly burdens Black Americans with lower earnings.

Studies have also shown that immigration, particularly from Latin America, has an adverse effect on Black wages (Borjas et al., 2006; Shihadeh & Barranco, 2010). Because Black workers, and in particular Black men, tend to cluster in low-skill, low-wage positions, they often end up in competition with immigrants from Latin America for the same jobs (Shihadeh & Barranco, 2010 p. 1396). Furthermore, the combination of employers' favorable opinions of low-skill Hispanic workers (over low-skill workers of other ethnicities) and Hispanic immigrants' willingness to work for lower wages than Black Americans results in a dramatic loss of low-skill jobs for Black workers (p. 1396, 1398).

Research on gender differences in income for Black Americans has shown that Black women are much less damaged by unequal pay relative to White women than Black men are relative to White men (Waters & Eschbach, 1995; Attewell et al., 2004). These findings indicate that, while Black women are paid less than their White counterparts, as are Black men, the wage disparity between Black and White women is less severe than the disparity between Black and White men. In fact, recent data have shown that the median weekly earnings for Black women in 2011 ($595) represented 85% of what White women earned ($703). In contrast, Black men's median weekly earnings in 2011 ($653) represented 76% of White men's median weekly earnings ($856) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Moreover, Attewell's study asserted that, given the same human capital as the average White woman, Black women would make nearly $3,000/year *more* than White women, whereas Black men make roughly 20% less than White men, given the same education and opportunities (Attewell et al., 2004 p. 9). These findings, along with Coleman, Grodsky and Pager's, suggest continued labor market discrimination, which disproportionately affects Black men. Black women, despite the relatively smaller salary gap with White women than Black men have with White men, on average, still receive lower weekly salaries than Black men (Bowman, 2010; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Similar to the research on home ownership and college completion, studies on Black sub-group earnings have found that African and West Indian immigrants tend to have higher median incomes than native-born Black Americans (Logan & Deane, 2003; Model, 2011). Specifically, Logan and Deane found large disparities in the median incomes of neighborhoods inhabited by Afro-Caribbean ($41,328) and African ($45,567) immigrants versus those of African-Americans ($35,679), suggesting much higher earnings for the immigrant groups (p. 10). Likewise, other studies have found that African and West Indian immigrants fare better economically than their African-American counterparts and are disproportionately represented in the Black middle class (Logan & Deane, 2003; Attewell et al., 2004; Landry & Marsh, 2011).

Labor Force Participation

Labor force participation refers to the number of working-age people who are either employed or unemployed but seeking work. Labor force participation rates reflect the ratio of the employed and unemployed to the size of the population of the same age, race, gender, etc.

Overall, Black Americans experience greater involuntary labor force withdrawal and higher rates of joblessness when compared with other racial groups (Flippen & Tienda, 2000). In 2008, the Black American employment population was 57.3%, compared to 62.8% for Whites (Bowman, 2010), which means that more than four out of every ten Black adults of working-age are either unemployed or outside of the workforce. These low rates of employment make sense historically. Black Americans' access to education and jobs were greatly limited by racially discriminatory legislation. Given the expansion of employment opportunities in recent times, however, the persistence of low labor force participation among Black Americans and its effect on income has prompted social research into the causes of differential rates of Black employment.

Western and Pettit (2005) focused on Black male joblessness, and found that the high rates of incarcerations among young Black males have had an adverse effect on their work force participation. According to the authors, incarceration accounts for a higher percentage of joblessness among Black men than White men (more than 20% versus 6%, respectively, in 1999) (p. 556). Further, for young men, the racial gap in joblessness, fueled by the soaring incarceration rates of Black men, increased by roughly 20% between 1980 and 2000 (p. 557). It can be argued, then, that higher rates of incarceration among Black males drive down the labor force participation figures for Black Americans as a whole.

Research has also uncovered a labor force gender disparity for Black Americans similar to that of college completion rates. Studies have shown that a greater number of Black men than Black women are outside of the labor force. One study showed that while only one-fifth of Black women remain outside of the labor force, roughly one-third of Black men are (Katz, Stern, & Fader, 2005 p. 82). In 2000, roughly 12% of working-age Black men were

incarcerated (p. 82). As discussed above, these high rates of incarceration in the Black male population drive the figures for their labor force detachment.

Other studies have shown that, while mass incarceration threatens Black male labor force participation, the greatest impediments to Black female labor force participation are non-completion of high school, having a child under 6 years old in the household, and being a long-term welfare recipient (Browne, 1997). Similarly, Browne found that among Black female heads-of-household, labor force participation was only 50.4%, compared to 81.7% for Whites (Browne, 2000 p. 917). In both studies, Black female heads-of-household were more likely to reside in metropolitan areas than White women. As a result, both studies concluded that an interaction of the suburbanization of service jobs into which Black women cluster, lack of secondary school completion, and challenges associated with finding and providing child care as a single parent greatly limit the labor force participation of Black female heads-of-household.

Black workers in general are highly disadvantaged in labor force participation. In fact, D'Amico and Maxwell (1995 p. 976) reported that, controlling for age and education, Black Americans are 10% less likely to be employed, face 5% more unemployment, and work 300 fewer hours a year than the workforce at large. These results illustrate that even within the labor force Black Americans face disproportionate challenges in employment.

Furthermore, other studies have found that, within the labor force, Black Americans tend to cluster in lower-level positions relative to Whites, despite gains in reaching middle- and upper-management positions. In 2008, 40% of Black men and 60% of Black women worked in service, sales, or office jobs (Bowman, 2010). These positions tend to pay less relative to the

jobs that White men and women cluster in for a net loss of roughly 18% per hour (Kmec, 2003 p. 54).

Although the labor force participation rates for Black Americans as a whole are lower than Whites, research has shown differential labor force participation among the different Black ethnic groups. Suzanne Model's *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?* (2011) noted that West Indian immigrants fare better in labor force participation than native-born Black Americans.

Employment

Racial discrimination has been shown to color hiring practices by employers at different levels of the job market. For example, Pager and her associates have shown that Black job applicants are much less likely than equally qualified Whites to receive a call-back for low-wage jobs. They designed two experiments to test for discriminatory practices by employers (Pager, 2003; Pager et al., 2009). In her first study, Pager tested employers' willingness to hire Black and White non- and ex-offenders. Two pairs of men of each race (one with a fictional criminal record and one without) were sent to apply for randomly selected jobs and the rate of call-backs were measured using four independent voicemail boxes. Surprisingly, the study found that even the White applicant with the (fictional) criminal record had a greater call-back rate than the Black applicant without a record (17% versus 14%, respectively) (Pager, 2003 p. 958).

The second study matched a group of Black, White, and Latino job applicants who had similar backgrounds and gave them equivalent resumes to apply to 340 entry-level jobs in New York City (Pager et al., 2009 p. 781). The rate of call-backs and/or job offers was recorded for

each applicant. Although the résumés submitted presented the three applicants as equally qualified, the Black applicant received the fewest positive responses (15.2%), compared to the Latino (25.2%) and the White applicant (31.0%) (p. 784). The authors also noted that when the Black applicant *did* receive a positive response, it was with greater reluctance than either the White or Latino applicant. As a result, Pager and associates concluded that, "the magnitude of these racial disparities provides vivid evidence of the continuing significance of race in contemporary low-wage labor markets" (p. 793). These findings are important because they demonstrate the challenges that Black job applicants face in the job market and provide a contrast to the notion that race has declined in significance.

Finally, although limited professional networks have not been shown to keep Black workers from finding employment (Fernandez & Fernandez, 2006), studies have demonstrated that as labor cycles weaken, Black employees are disproportionately affected by job loss (Kroll, 2012). For example, a study to test the claim that in economic downturns Black workers are the "first fired, last hired" found that Black workers are more affected by changes in the economic climate than White workers (Couch & Fairlie, 2010 p. 237).

The literature on Black employment by gender illustrates that racial discrimination replicates gender disparities in employment for Black Americans. Irene Browne found in her studies barriers to labor force participation for Black women, and Phillip Cohen found that Black single women with children are less likely to find employment without including in their households other adults (Cohen, 2002 p. 456). He found that lower levels of employment are due to the challenges single working parents have finding childcare and because employment may actually *increase* hardships for single mothers rather than alleviate them (p. 460).

On the other hand, Attewell and associates found that the persistent wage and employment gaps between Black and White men disadvantaged both Black men with low-wage jobs as well as professional Black men (p. 9). This finding is critical. It shows that along with the challenges that Black women face in finding employment as single parents the financial security of Black families in America is hindered on several fronts.

Finally, one study about the Black gender disparity in employment found that highly educated Black women were rated as more suitable for jobs and more likely to be selected for high-skill jobs than comparably educated Black men (Hosoda, Stone, & Stone-Romero, 2003).

Poverty Status

Poverty status refers to living under the poverty threshold, which is the minimum income needed to provide a household of a given size their basic needs for a year. Poverty levels are highly related to labor force participation, employment, and income. According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to qualify as living in poverty, a single adult must earn less than $11,170 a year and a family of four must earn less than $23,050 a year (DHHS, 2012). Poverty measures take into account the cost of living and other essential resources, such as food, and thus fluctuate with the economy. Furthermore, the poverty guidelines set by the federal government are often used to determine who qualifies for public assistance. According to the most recent estimates, most Black people are **not** poor (only one in five Black families is), but Blacks have the highest poverty rate for any racial category (Bowman, 2010).

The root causes of the high poverty rate in Black Americans have already been partially illuminated in the studies of Black American income, employment, labor force participation,

and college completion. Unequal access to resources and opportunities keeps a large number of Black Americans from achieving upward mobility, and the effects of racism and discrimination place further constraints on their lives.

Singh (1991 p. 512) has shown that much of the poverty in Black America is concentrated in inner city neighborhoods. Massive industrial job losses in the 1980s affected inner city Blacks more severely than any other group. The study also found that despite the subsequent economic upturn, Black inner cities did not experience any financial improvement. A more recent study has showed that for the poorest African-Americans race and class continue to function together to form a barrier to opportunities, resources, and wealth (Hawkins & Maurer, 2012).

Studies have shown that being married decreases significantly the odds of being poor for Black homeowners because it allows for pooling of income and resources (Horton & Allen, 1998). Consequently, the growth of female-headed households and decline in male employment opportunities have correlated with higher poverty rates among Black Americans (Laseter, 1997; Horton & Allen, 1998; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Albrecht, 2000). This "feminization of poverty" has disproportionately affected Black Americans.

In fact, research has shown that despite having comparable human capital and unemployment rates, Black women experience higher poverty rates than Black males (Ezalea-Harrison, 2010). These higher poverty rates may be attributable in part to the pay gap between Black men and women combined with the increased financial burdens that come with being the head of a household.

Chapter 3

METHODS

Introduction

The preceding chapters explored theories and literature that focus on the effects of race and class on the Black population's ability to acquire social, cultural, and human capital. Further, Chapters One and Two also discussed this dissertation's interest in examining socioeconomic trajectories as they relate to nativity and gender within the U.S. Black population. Chapter Three explains the methodology utilized in this study.

This dissertation examines and contrasts the socioeconomic trajectories for a nationally representative sample of U.S.- and foreign-born Blacks in the United States from 1980 to 2010 across a series of demographic and economic variables. It draws on the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the United States Census Bureau's 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census and 2008-10 (3-year cross-sectional data) American Community Survey (ACS).

This dissertation uses synthetic age cohort analysis to examine the socioeconomic differences between US- and foreign-born blacks and men and women. Synthetic age cohort analysis uses repeated cross-sectional surveys to infer changes over time occurring to certain birth cohorts and compares equivalent age cohorts (for example US- and foreign-born Black men who were 25 to 34 in 1980) and different age cohorts over time (Black men who were 25 to 34 in 1980 compared to Black men who were 25 to 34 in 1990).

Synthetic age cohort analysis is supplemented with life course theory as the use of cross-sectional data can confound analysis of age, period, and cohort effects. Life course theory (Mayer 2009) is a multi-disciplinary approach in which an individual's sequential decisions over a life course are viewed as shaped through structural, social, and cultural contexts. This theoretical approach helps to frame the differences resulting between synthetic age cohorts over time in this analysis.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, *Dataset*, provides a detailed description of how the Census and the American Community Survey were designed, how respondents were selected, and the components included in the study. The second section, *Measures*, describes the outcome variables and synthetic age cohorts used in the analysis. The third section, *Analytic Strategy*, describes the data analysis methods and strategy.

Dataset

Data for this dissertation employs the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the United States Census Bureau's 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census and 2008-10 (3-year cross-sectional data) American Community Survey (ACS). The Minnesota Population Center provides harmonized Census Bureau data. These cross-sectional data sets were chosen because of their large sample size, which allows for robust statistical analyses at a detailed level. Further, these surveys include the variables necessary to investigate successfully the questions posed in this dissertation.

The Census data is a 5 percent sample of the United States population, while the American Community Survey is a 3 percent sample. The total sample size for this dissertation is 1,484,747 (200,373 in 1980; 369,600 in 1990; 591,608 in 2000; and, 323,166 in 2008-10). The

sample for this analysis is restricted to Blacks aged 25 to 64. Group quarters, which include nursing homes, dorms, and prisons, have been excluded from this analysis. Therefore, findings from this research may differ from previous work that includes these populations.

In order to construct synthetic age cohorts (see the *Measures* section for further information on synthetic age cohorts) that are as similar as possible, further restrictions were placed on the sample. For example, the foreign-born age cohort that was 35 to 44 in 1990 was restricted to those who had been in the US for at least 10 years so that they could be compared to those foreign-born in 1980 who were 25 to 34 years of age.

Measures

What follows is the list of variables selected to conduct the study. After the dependent measures, the operational definitions of the independent predictors (the synthetic age cohorts) are presented.

Dependent Variables

1) "Not in Labor Force" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is (coded 0) or is not (coded 1) in the civilian labor force. This dummy results from the recoding of LABFORCE "Labor force status."

2) "Home Ownership" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent owns or is buying their dwelling on a loan (coded 1) or is renting their dwelling (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of OWNERSHP "Ownership of dwelling."

3) "Poverty" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is (coded 1) or is not (coded 0) in poverty. This dummy results from the recoding of POVERTY "Poverty status,"

which, using the definition established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently modified by the Federal interagency committees in 1969 and 1980, measures whether family units fall above or below the poverty threshold.

4) "Employed" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is employed (coded 1) or is not employed (coded 2) in the civilian labor force. This dummy results from the recoding of EMPSTAT "Employment status."

5) "Four-Year College Completion" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent had less than (coded 0) or at least (coded 1) a Bachelor's degree. This dummy results from the recoding of EDUC "Educational attainment.'"

6) "Total Personal Median Income" is an interval measure of the respondent's total personal income. This measure has been adjusted to 2010 dollars using the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). This measure results from the recoding of INCTOT "Total personal income," which reports the respondent's total pre-tax personal income or losses from all sources for the previous year. Only respondent's with incomes of at least $1 were included in the analysis.

Synthetic Age Cohorts

In this dissertation, synthetic age cohorts serve as the predictors of the dependent measures explained above. Below is an operational description of how they were constructed (see Analytic Strategy for a detailed description of their application). First, the variables used to construct the synthetic age cohorts are listed. Second, the constructed synthetic age cohorts are detailed.

Variables Used to Construct Synthetic Age Cohorts

1) "Age" is a variable already existing in the IPUMS Datasets (AGE "Age") measuring the respondent's age at a continuous interval level.

2) "Nativity" is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is US-born (coded 1) or is foreign-born (coded 0). This dummy results from the recoding of BPL "Birthplace."

3) "Sex" is a variable already existing in the IPUMS Datasets (SEX "Sex") indicating whether the respondent is Male (coded 1) or Female (coded 2).

4) "Years in the US" is a categorical variable that reports how long a person who was born in a foreign country had been living in the United States at the time of the survey. The variable results from the recoding of two variables. For 1980 and 1990 data YRSUSA2 "Years in the United States" is used and the variable is measured as follows: 1 = "0 to 5 years"; 2 = "6 to 10 years"; 3 = "11 to 15 years"; 4 = "16 to 20 years"; 5 = "21+ years". For 2000 and 2008-10 data YRSUSA1 "Years in the United States" is used and is a continuous measure.

Construction of Synthetic Age Cohorts

The synthetic age cohorts were divided into three main age cohorts that were followed over time: 1) those who were 25 to 34 in 1980; 2) those who were 25 to 34 in 1990; and 3) those who were 25 to 34 in 2000. For example, persons aged between 25 to 34 years old when surveyed in 1980, were 35 to 44 years old in 1990, and were 45 to 54 years old in 2000, and were 55 to 64 years old in 2008-10.

Further, the synthetic age cohorts were stratified by nativity (US-born and foreign-born) and sex (male and female). Below is how the cohorts were constructed.

The following age cohorts were constructed for three sets of comparison groups:

1) Nativity: US-born, foreign-born;

2) Sex: male, female;

3) Nativity and Sex: US-born men, US-born women, foreign born men, foreign-born women.

Age Cohort 1 (25 to 34 years old in 1980)

- 25 to 34 years old in 1980;
- 35 to 44 years old in 1990 (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 11 years);
- 45 to 54 years old in 2000 (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 21 years);
- 55 to 64 years old in 2008-10 and (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 31 years);

Age Cohort 2 (25 to 34 years old in 1990)

- 25 to 34 years old in 1990;
- 35 to 44 years old in 2000 (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 11 years);
- 45 to 54 years old in 2010 (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 21 years);

Age Cohort 3 (25 to 34 years old in 2000)

- 25 to 34 years old in 2000;

- 35 to 44 years old in 2010 (for foreign-born, those having lived in the United States for at least 11 years);

Analytic Strategy

The goal of this dissertation is to examine changes over time on six socioeconomic outcomes for the Black population. The six indicators used in this analysis (income, poverty status, educational attainment, home ownership, employment, and labor force participation) are objective measures of socioeconomic standing. Subjective measures, such as occupational prestige score, which are arguably racially- or gender-biased, are not used.

Because this dissertation is using survey data that are repeated cross sections of the US population, social mobility for individuals cannot be directly measured (currently, there are no longitudinal data available, with the variables needed for this study, that follow Black individuals in the United States from 1980 to 2010). Synthetic age cohort analysis, however, is a technique used in this dissertation, which can address change over time.

This kind of analysis uses repeated cross-sectional surveys to infer changes over time occurring in certain birth cohorts. For example, in this dissertation, persons aged between 25 and 34 years old when surveyed in 1980 were 35 to 44 years old in 1990, were 45 to 54 years old in 2000, and 55 to 64 years old in 2010. Therefore, this dissertation analyzed an age cohort (initially 25-34 in 1980) that was studied repeatedly in 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010. Even though the same people were not surveyed in each of the censuses or American Community Surveys, if the samples in each survey are large and nationally-representative, it is reasonable to compare rates of poverty for this cohort in 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 and infer the trajectory or pattern of poverty over time for this age cohort. Similarly, this dissertation followed a synthetic age cohort

of American-born Black women who were 25-34 years old in 1980 over the subsequent surveys, and compare their outcomes (on being in the labor force, home ownership, poverty, educational attainment, employment, and income) with the equivalent age cohort of US-born Black men.

Using the same approach, this dissertation compared different age cohorts over time. For example, this dissertation analyzed six dependent variables among Black men who were 25-34 years old in 1980 and the changes in that outcome in 1990, 2000, and 2010 and compared the trajectory with the cohort of Black men who were 25 to 34 years old in 1990 and their outcomes in 2000 and 2010.

Comparing US- and foreign-born groups is a little more complicated. An analysis beginning with a US-born group who were included in the 1980 survey would then compare them to a group of Black immigrants who were also present in the US in 1980. (The surveys have a question that reports what year an immigrant entered the US). One can compare the trajectories on income, poverty, employment, labor force participation, education, home ownership for these two groups over later years. One must exclude from such analysis immigrants who entered after 1980, or one is not comparing like and like.

Synthetic age cohort analysis has been often applied to census data, which provide information on 10-year age cohorts at 10-year intervals. For example, Levy (1987) successfully applied this method to his study of shifts in the U.S. income distribution from 1950 to 1980. This method will document which age cohorts and subgroups within the Black population have experienced the greatest social mobility over time.

There were twelve synthetic age cohort analyses used in this study. Each dependent variable had a set of two analyses for the age cohorts. The two analyses were done separately for two types of age cohorts: (1) US-born Blacks and foreign-born Blacks and (2) Black women and

Black men. The analyses examined changes in social mobility within and across these age cohorts. Existing research has shown that these six socioeconomic outcomes are evidence of social mobility (Alba and Logan, 1992; Pew Research Center, 2011).

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter explores the following research question: Are some groups within the Black population going from strength to strength, while others are stagnating or even sliding backwards in terms of various socioeconomic indicators (labor force participation, home ownership, poverty, employment, education, and income)? To answer this question, this dissertation utilized data from the nationally representative Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the United States Census Bureau's 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census and 2008-10 (3-year cross-sectional data) American Community Survey (ACS). This analysis of Census and ACS data used repeated cross-sectional surveys to infer changes over time occurring to certain birth cohorts stratified by gender and nativity, as well as comparing different age cohorts over time.

How many owned homes as opposed to renting, and how did this change between 1980 and 2010 for different age cohorts? Were there tangible differences in terms of educational attainment, poverty, and income for the age cohorts of the groups under investigation during these time periods? Were Black women more or less likely to be employed than Black men, and has this changed for different age cohorts over time? The Census and ACS data provide insight into these and other questions; all critical to understanding how this particular type of social mobility is differentially experienced across Black ethnic groups within the United States.

The data selected from the Census and ACS to facilitate this dissertation focus on 1,484,747 (200,373 in 1980; 369,600 in 1990; 591,608 in 2000; and, 323,166 in 2008-10) Non-Hispanic Blacks from ages of 25 to 64. To analyze the socioeconomic indicators of these groups, a synthetic age cohort analysis was used to infer change and differences between these groups.

The analysis described above resulted in 36 different figures comparing cohorts across time and life course on six socioeconomic variables. The remainder of this chapter focuses on summarizing the main findings. First, looking at nativity, results show where (a) US-born are doing better than foreign-born; (b) where US-born are doing worse than foreign-born; and (c) where there is no difference between US-born and foreign-born. Second, looking at gender, results will be shown where (a) women are doing better than men; (b) where women are doing worse than men; and, (c) where there is no difference between women and men. Third, the overall picture of the effects of (a) nativity and (b) gender will be described.

US-Born Doing Better than Foreign-Born

Home Ownership

Younger cohorts (between the ages of 25 and 34) of US-born Blacks have higher home-ownership rates than younger cohorts of foreign-born Blacks across all three time periods (1990, 2000, and 2010), but this advantage disappears after the age of 34 (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The most marked difference is in the year 1980 when the youngest cohort of US-born Blacks had a home ownership rate of 31.1% as compared to 19.2% for the foreign-born cohort (a difference of almost 11 percentage points). In both 2000 and 2010 the youngest cohort of US-born had a home-ownership rate that was 5% higher than their foreign-born counterparts.

US-Born Doing Worse than Foreign-Born

Four-Year College Completion

US-born Blacks (1) have a significantly lower rate of completing a four year degree across cohorts and time-periods; and (2) the slope of completion over the life-course of US-born Blacks is much lower for US-born Blacks than foreign-born Blacks (Figures 4, 5, and 6). In regards to finding 1, about 12% of US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 in 1980 had completed a four-year college degree, as compared to about 18% of foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 in the same time-period (a 6 percentage point difference). Also, this gap has increased over time: about 12% of US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 in 1990 had completed a four-year college degree, as compared to about 23% of foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 in the same time-period (an 11 percentage point difference).

In regards to finding 2, for the cohort of US-born Blacks who were 25 to 34 in 1980 and 55 to 64 in 2010, the increase in four-year college completion was about 6 percentage points over the life course (about 12% had completed a four-year degree in 1980 and about 18% had completed it in 2010). The cohort of foreign-born Blacks who were 25 to 34 in 1980 and 55 to 64 in 2010 increased their four-year college completion by about 14 percentage points over the life course (about 18% had completed a four-year degree in 1980 and about 32% had completed it in 2010).

Median Total Personal Income

Although there is no difference in income between US- and foreign-born at younger ages foreign-born Blacks have higher incomes over the life course as compared to US-born Blacks, (Figures 7, 8, and 9). In 1980, the cohort of US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had total personal income of about $20,255, which by the time they were between the ages of 55 to 64 in 2010 had only increased by about $1,000 to around $21,572. The cohort of foreign-born Blacks aged 25 to 34 in 1980 had total personal income of about $18,535, which by the time they were from the ages of 55 to 64 in 2010 had increased by about $14,000 to around $32,409.

Not in the Labor Force

US- and foreign-born cohorts of Blacks have the same labor force participation at younger ages, but US-born Blacks are much less likely to be in the labor force over the life-course (Figures 10, 11, and 12). In 1980, about 21 percent of the cohort of US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force, and when this cohort was 55 to 64 years of age in 2010 about 43 percent did not participate in the labor force (an increase of 22 percentage points of this cohort not participating in the labor force over the life course). In 1980, about 21 percent of the cohort of foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force (the same percent as US-born), and when this cohort was 55 to 64 years of age in 2010 about 25 percent did not participate in the labor force (an increase of only four percentage points of this cohort not participating in the labor force over the life course).

Home Ownership

Although foreign-born Blacks have a slightly lower home ownership rate during earlier periods of the life course than US-born Blacks, foreign-born Blacks have an increasingly higher rate of home ownership through later stages of the life course (Figures 1, 2, and 3). For example, in 1980, US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had a home ownership rate of about 31 percent as compared to foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 who had a home ownership rate of about 19 percent (a 12 percentage-point difference). This relationship, however, reverses at later stages in life. US-bon Blacks from the ages of 55 to 64 in 2010 had a home ownership rate of about 59 percent, as compared to about a 67 percent home ownership rate for the same age and period cohort of foreign-born Blacks (a difference of nine percentage points). And, this trend continues for more recent age cohorts (Figures 2 and 3).

Poverty

Over the life course, foreign-born Blacks are less likely to be in poverty than US-born Blacks and older cohorts of foreign-born Blacks slightly decreased their poverty rate during the Great Recession of 2007, while older cohorts of US-born Blacks increased their poverty rate during the same time period (Figures 13, 14, and 15). In 1980 about 22 percent of the cohort of US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 was in poverty, and when this cohort was 55 to 64 years of age in 2010 about 18 percent were in poverty (a decrease of only 3 percentage points over the life course). In 1980 about 21 percent of the cohort of foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 were in poverty (almost the same percent as US-born), and when this cohort was 55 to 64 years of age in 2010 only about nine percent were in poverty (a decrease of 12 percentage points over the life course).

Further, the Great Recession negatively affected older cohorts of US-born Blacks in regards to poverty status, while foreign-born Blacks slightly edged out of poverty in the same period. In 2000, the US-born Black cohort from the ages of 35 to 44 had a poverty rate of about 18 percent, which increased to 19 percent in 2010 when this cohort was between the ages of 45 to 54. In 2000, however, the foreign-born Black cohort from the ages of 35 to 44 had a poverty rate of about 11 percent, which decreased to about 8 percent in 2010 when this cohort was aged 45 to 54.

Employment

Although there is no substantial difference in employment for Blacks at younger stages in life, foreign-born Blacks are more likely than US-born Blacks to be employed over the life course; and the Great Recession more negatively affected older cohorts of US-born Blacks than the same age cohort of foreign-born Blacks (Figures 16, 17, and 18). In 2000, about 71 percent of the US-born cohort from the ages of 25 to 34 was employed, and when this cohort was 35 to 44 in 2010 about 74 percent were employed. Similarly, in 2000 about 71 percent of the foreign-born cohort from the ages of 25 to 34 was employed; however, when this cohort was 35 to 44 in 2010 about 83 percent were employed (a larger increase in employment than for US-born Blacks).

Further, the Great Recession had a slightly negative effect on the employment of older cohorts of US-born Blacks, while foreign-born Blacks actually increased employment in the same period. In 2000, the US-born Black cohort from the ages of 35 to 44 had an employment ratio of about 70 percent, which slightly decreased to 69 percent in 2010 when this cohort was aged 45 to 54. In 2000, however, the foreign-born Black cohort from the ages of 35 to 44 had an

employment ratio of about 78 percent, which increased to about 83 percent in 2010 when this cohort was aged 45 to 54.

No Difference Between US-Born and Foreign-Born

Employment

Although foreign-born Blacks have a slightly higher employment rate over the life course compared to US-born Blacks, there is no difference between the two groups at younger ages (Figures 16, 17, and 18). In 1980, US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had an employment ratio of about 70% compared to foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 who had an employment ratio of about 72% (a two percentage-point difference). Further, this negligible difference persisted for the 25 to 34 year old cohort in 2000. US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had an employment ratio of about 71% compared to foreign-born Blacks who also had an employment ratio of about 71%.

Not in the Labor Force

Although, US-born Blacks are much less likely to be in the labor force over the life-course than foreign-born Blacks, younger cohorts of Blacks have the same labor force participation (Figures 10, 11, and 12). In 1980, about 21 percent of both US- and foreign-born cohorts of Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force. Similarly, in 2010, about 21 percent of the US-born cohort aged of 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force, compared to about 23% of the foreign-born cohort of the same age.

Poverty

Although foreign-born Blacks have a lower poverty rate over the life course than US-born Blacks, there was no substantial difference between younger cohorts in 1980 (Figure 13). In 1980, US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had a poverty rate of about 22% compared to foreign-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 who had a poverty rate of about 21% (a one percentage-point difference).

Median Total Personal Income

Although foreign-born Blacks have higher income over the life course than US-born Blacks, there was no difference between the two groups at younger ages (Figures 7 and 9). In 1980, US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had a total personal income of about $20,255 compared to foreign-born Blacks aged 25 to 34 who had a total personal income of about $18,535 (a difference of about $1,500). Further, this negligible difference persisted for the 25 to 34 year old cohort in 2000: US-born Blacks from the ages of 25 to 34 had a total personal income of about $23,457 compared to foreign-born Blacks who also had a total personal income of about $24,687.

Women Doing Better than Men

Four-Year College Completion

Across cohorts, Black women are more highly educated than Black men; and, the gap is increasing. In 2000 about 18% of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 had completed a four-year college degree, compared to about 15% of Black men aged 25 to 34 in the same time-period

(a 3 percentage point difference). Further, the gap has been increasing over time for similar cohorts: in 1990, there was no difference in educational attainment between cohorts of men and women from the ages of 35 to 44 (in both groups, about 16% had completed a four-year degree). In 2010, however, for those aged 35 to 44 there was a gap between men and women: about 23% of women had completed a four-year degree compared to about 19% of men (a 4 percentage point difference).

Poverty

Although Black men are less likely to be in poverty across time periods and cohorts than Black women, Black women are moving out of poverty, while Black men are staying in poverty (Figures 22, 23, 24). Fifteen percent of the cohort of Black men from the ages of 25 to 34, in 1980, were in poverty compared to 27% of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 during the same time period (a difference of 12 percentage points). In 2010, however, when both cohorts were aged 55 to 64, Black male poverty rates increased by two percentage points to about 17%, while Black female rates decreased by 8 percentage points to about 19%.

Home Ownership

Although Black men are more likely to own homes across time periods and cohorts than Black women, Black women increased home ownership during the Great recession, while Black men saw a negligible change (Figure 26). The cohort of Black men who were 35 to 44 in 2000 increased their home ownership by one percentage point in 2010, when they were aged 45 to 54 (from about 55% to about 56%), while Black women who were 35 to 44 in 2000 increased their home ownership by 11 percentage points in 2010 (from about 37% to about 48%).

Women Doing Worse than Men

Not in the Labor Force

Black women are less likely to participate in the labor force in earlier periods of their lives (Figures 28, 29, and 30). In 1980, about 28 percent of Black women, compared to 12 percent of Black men, from the ages of 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force (a difference of 16 percentage points). Further, although this gap between Black men and women has been decreasing over time for younger cohorts, younger Black women are still less likely to participate in the labor force: in 2010, about 24 percent of Black women aged 25 to 34 did not participate in the labor force, compared to 19 percent of Black men of the same ages (a difference of five percentage points).

Employment

Although during the life course the gap in employment between Black men and women closes, at earlier stages in life, across all time periods, women are less likely than men to be employed (Figures 31, 32, and 33). In 1980, about 64 percent of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 were employed, compared to about 78 percent of Black men of the ages (a difference of 14 percentage points). Similarly, in 1990, about 66 percent of Black women aged 25 to 34, compared to about 76 percent of Black men of the same ages, were employed (a difference of 10 percentage points). Further, although this gap is closing, it persisted in 2000: about 69 percent of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 were employed, as compared to 73 percent of Black men aged 25 to 34 (a difference of four percentage points).

Median Total Personal Income

Although Black men and women's total personal income share an almost identical trajectory across cohorts and time periods, women continue to earn less than men (Figures 34, 35, and 36). In 1990, Black women aged 35 to 44 earned on average $22,277; Black men from the ages of 35 to 44 earned $31,692 (Black men earned about 42 percent more than women). And, although this gap has been decreasing over time, it persists; in 2010 Black women aged 35 to 44 earned around $25,200, while in 2010 Black men from the ages of 35 to 44 earned around $30,384 (Black men earned about 21 percent more than women).

Home Ownership

Although the gap has decreased over time, Black women are less likely than Black men to be home owners (Figures 25, 26, and 27). In 2010, about 39 percent of Black women from the ages of 35 to 44 owned a home, while about 48 percent of Black men within the same age range owned a home (a difference of nine percentage points).

Poverty

Although Black women are moving out of poverty while Black men are staying in poverty, Black women have a substantially higher poverty rate across time periods and cohorts (Figures 22, 23, and 24). For example, fifteen percent of the cohort of Black men from the ages of 25 to 34 in 1980 were in poverty, compared to 27% of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 in 1980 (a difference of 12 percentage points). Further, this difference persisted for younger cohorts in 2010; fifteen percent of the cohort of Black men from the ages of 25 to 34 in 2010

were in poverty, compared to 25% of Black women within the same age range (a difference of 10 percentage points).

No Difference Between Men and Women

Employment

Although Black men are slightly more likely to be employed than Black women, the gap between them closes over the life course (Figure 33). In 2000, about 73% of the cohort of Black men from the ages of 25 to 34 were employed as compared to about 69% of Black women in the same age cohort (a four percentage point difference). In 2010, however, when both cohorts were 35 to 44 years old, the gap between men and women closed. In 2010, about 76% of the cohort of Black men aged 35 to 44 were employed, compared to about 75% of Black women (a one percentage point difference).

Further, Black men are more likely than Black women to be employed in younger stages of life and earlier periods of time, the gap in employment disappeared for those in prime working age in 2010 (Figures 31, 32, and 33). In 2010, about 76 percent of Black men, compared to about 75 percent of Black women, from the ages of 35 to 44 were employed.

Four-Year College Completion

Although younger cohorts of Black women were increasingly more educated than Black men between 1990 and 2010, there was no significant difference in educational attainment over the life course for cohorts that were 25 to 34 in 1980 (Figure 19). In 1980, about 12 percent of Black women from the ages of 25 to 34 had completed a four-year college degree. In 2010, when

this cohort was aged 55 to 64, about 19 percent had completed a four year degree (an increase of seven percentage points). In 1980 about 12 percent of Black men from 25 to 34 years old had completed a four-year college degree. In 2010, when this cohort was aged 55 to 64, about 18 percent had completed a four year degree (an increase of six percentage points).

Summary of Findings

In terms of nativity, although foreign-born Blacks at earlier stages in life do less well or just as well as US-born Blacks on the socioeconomic indicators used in this analysis, over the life course and in more recent periods, foreign-born Blacks are doing much better than Blacks born in the United States. In regards to gender, although Black men do better on all of the socioeconomic indicators used in this analysis (except for educational attainment), over the life course and in more recent periods, Black women are doing increasingly better while Black men are remaining stagnant or performing worse on most of the indicators in this analysis.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Home Ownership

The results of this dissertation uncovered two important trends about Black home ownership: generally, Black women tend to fare worse than Black men in rates of home ownership, whereas foreign-born Blacks tend to do better than U.S.-born Blacks. These trends are significant because they illustrate the variability within the Black population with regard to home ownership and support a more nuanced view of Black socioeconomic standing. Moreover, this dissertation's results are important for adding a more detailed analysis of Black Americans to the existing literature on their home ownership in the United States.

Specifically, this dissertation's results show the disparity in home ownership rates between Black men and women has been closing throughout the decades under study (1980-2010). Although Black men are more likely to own homes in each age cohort and time period, Black women's gains in the most recent between 2000 and 2010 have outpaced Black men's gains. These findings support and expand upon Collins and Margo (2000), who looked at home ownership rates among Black and White men and women from 1900-2000 and found that: (1) between 1900 and 1990, Black women made steady gains in their rates of home ownership, but consistently had lower rates of home ownership than Black men (p. 8) and (2) by 1990, Black women made up nearly 40% of heads of households in owner-occupied housing (p. 27).

The findings of both this dissertation and the Collins and Margo study reveal that Black women are quickly becoming a larger proportion of home owners in the Black population. In fact,

this increase coincides with the general rise in female-headed households in the United States, which has been observed and documented in recent years. The increase in the number of female-headed households has usually been linked to the concept of the "feminization of poverty," in which women and their households, in recent years, have increasingly constituted a disproportionate percentage of those living in poverty. Therefore, it is interesting that this increase coincides with an increase in home ownership for Black women, who tend to be poorer relative to both Black men and White women. Since this study does not control for levels of income in the analysis, it is not possible to say at which income level(s) the increase in home ownership is occurring, but an earlier study by Marsh and associates (2007) points to a potential answer. In their study of what they termed the "Love Jones Cohort," Kris Marsh and colleagues found that among single Black men and women living alone make up a larger proportion of Black home owners in recent years (p. 749). This cohort consists mainly of Black men and women aged 25 to 44 who, "hold high-wage positions, have advanced degrees, maintain household incomes above average and own their own homes" (p. 736), which suggests that the rise in female home owners may be occurring only among relatively young, well-educated, and financially well-off Black women. Furthermore, the growth in the number of college-educated Black women in the United States in recent decades may be linked to this rise in home ownership in this sub-population. Therefore, future research should focus on uncovering more about this trend, what is driving it, and whether it is limited to Black American women, or if Whites are experiencing the same changes as well.

The other important trend in Black home ownership is that as they age foreign-born Blacks tend to have higher rates than U.S.-born Blacks, despite having nearly equal rates at younger ages. In particular, this dissertation found that younger U.S.-born Black cohorts have a

slight advantage in home ownership over foreign-born Blacks, but that this advantage disappears by the mid-thirties. From age 35 onward, foreign-born Blacks increase the gap in home ownership with U.S.-born Blacks. These findings support and build upon those of the reviewed studies, which found that foreign-born Blacks tend to own a greater number of homes than U.S.-born Blacks, and that their homes tend to be of greater value than those of U.S.-born Blacks (Martin, 2009; Rivera, 2008; Logan & Deane, 2003).

Nevertheless, no studies reviewed for this dissertation have investigated the difference in home ownership over the life course for foreign-born and U.S.-born Black Americans. Therefore, factors contributing to such a substantial disparity between sub-populations have not yet been established. Several factors, including that foreign-born Blacks are better educated (Attewell et al., 2004; Rong & Brown, 2001), have higher median incomes (Landry & Marsh, 2011; Model, 2011), and experience lower rates of poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts (Logan & Deane, 2003), may influence the divergent rates of home ownership among the two groups. This better overall economic stability may allow foreign-born Blacks to outpace U.S.-born Blacks in home ownership, but it does not explain why the gap between the groups increases as cohorts age. Furthermore, although it provides evidence for this trend, this dissertation cannot determine how significant the disparity between foreign-born and U.S.-born Blacks is or which factors are predictive of the increasing difference. A more robust statistical analysis of the available data on the two groups' home ownership rates is needed to determine how significant this trend may be.

Overall, the trends involving the increasing home ownership of Black women and the disparity between foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks presents a more complex view of Black American home ownership. Further, these trends illustrate that Black sub-populations have

differing advantages and face different barriers in becoming home owners. In other words, not all Black Americans are similarly socioeconomically disadvantaged.

College Completion

This dissertation's analysis also uncovered three important trends regarding Black college completion rates. The first is that Black women in younger cohorts have a slight advantage in college completion rates over Black men, and this advantage has been increasing in recent years. The second trend is that, despite the advantage younger Black female cohorts have, Black men and women's college completion rates are similar over the life course for older cohorts. For older age groups, both Black men and women tend to have similar rates of college completion. The last trend is that foreign-born Blacks have a distinct advantage, which grows with age, over U.S.-born Blacks, as was the case with home ownership. These results illustrate that while Black men and women may be similarly disadvantaged in earning college degrees, nativity status still benefits foreign-born Blacks over U.S.-born Blacks. As a result of these trends, it makes more sense to discuss Black college completion rates with respect to the differing trajectories various sub-populations of Black Americans have taken, as was the case with home ownership. Further, because educational attainment has been shown to correlate positively with income and is thus an important aspect of personal socioeconomic advancement, these findings, particularly in light of prior research findings, are important for explaining or examining other socioeconomic trends in the Black American population.

The findings for college completion rates for Black men and women mostly, but not entirely, support earlier findings from other studies. Specifically, the finding that younger cohorts of Black women have an advantage over younger Black men in earning undergraduate

degrees, and that this disparity has been growing in recent years, confirms the findings of McDaniel and associates (2010) and the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), which shows that Black college-educated women outnumbered Black college-educated men and earn degrees at higher rates than Black men. This trend may have important implications for the Black population's socioeconomic stability going forward. Given that female-headed households are growing in the Black population, the increase in college-educated Black women in younger cohorts could represent a positive change for the growth of the Black middle class. As more Black women become educated and move up in socioeconomic status in coming years the Black middle class is likely to expand. Further, an increase in the number of college-educated Black women, providing that these increases in education translate into higher employment and income, could help eliminate inequalities between Black men and women.

While this dissertation found that Black men and women's college completion rates for older cohorts tend to equalize over the course of their lives, none of the studies reviewed or data produced similar findings. This difference is mainly attributable to a key methodological difference: previous studies tended to use aggregate figures for Black men and women of particular ages (e.g., aged 19 and older), while this dissertation stratified the data by age cohorts and time periods. As a result, this dissertation tracked changes in different age cohorts over time (and thus, detected a pattern of college completion throughout the lifespan), while previous studies have only tracked the changes over time (and therefore, could only report on changes throughout the years studied).

This trend of equalization over the lifespan introduces two important ideas about the relationship of gender to college completion among Black Americans. First, college completion rates equalize over the life course for older cohorts and suggest that younger Black cohorts may

follow a similar trajectory. If that is the case, then Black men may just be delayed in starting and completing their college degrees rather than being outpaced by Black women completely. Further research will needed to determine if Black men are matching the college completion rates of Black women as they age. Moreover, while the results suggest that Black men and women are becoming equally educated at later ages, their college completion rates are still much lower than White Americans'. This trend means that to increase the numbers of Black men and women who are graduating college to reach parity with Whites, the specific psychosocial factors and life courses of each gender need to be considered.

This dissertation's findings confirm that foreign-born Blacks start with higher rates of college completion than U.S.-born Blacks, and this disparity increases as both groups age. The results support earlier research, which found that foreign-born Blacks are disproportionately represented among Black college graduates (Attewell et al., 2004), and complete undergraduate degrees at higher rates than their native-born counterparts (Rong & Brown, 2001). Additionally, this dissertation's results, along with the extant literature, provide evidence for the idea that the variability in the Black population necessitates a more nuanced analysis of socioeconomic trajectories. Finally, in light of previous findings on the relationship between nativity and college completion among Black Americans, it appears that the nativity status of foreign-born Blacks acts to buffer them from the difficulties that U.S.-born Blacks face.

In fact, whereas earlier researchers presumed that foreign-born status would hamper educational attainment for Black immigrant groups, the literature suggests that it has the opposite effect. One possibility is that since foreign-born Black that immigrate to the U.S. tend to be more highly educated, they and their children start off with an advantage that only grows as time passes. Another potential explanation for the disparity in college completion between foreign-

and U.S.-born Blacks is that foreign ethnicity insulates them from the less achievement-oriented aspects often attributed to the U.S.-born Black population. Because foreign-born Blacks have their own ethnicities with which to identify, they can create social distance between themselves and U.S.-born Blacks. This ethnic buffering allows them to disassociate from the "oppositional culture" that is purported to hold U.S.-born Blacks back. As a result, foreign-born Black students may value education more highly and thus achieve at a higher level. Finally, viewing this Black ethnic disparity in college completion through the lens of William Julius Wilson's theory about the "declining significance of race," suggests that foreign-born Blacks may not experience the same barriers to college completion as U.S.-born Blacks. Perhaps fewer barriers combined with a favorable view of Black immigrants as hard-working might allow foreign-born Blacks to attain higher levels of education

Income

The analysis of Black American median incomes illustrates that gender and ethnicity play important roles in changes in income over time and throughout age groups. Although previous research has shown that Black Americans as a whole suffer from income inequality (Weatern & Pettit, 2005; Kochhar, 2004; Kmec, 2003), this dissertation found that the different sub-populations of Black Americans have experienced varying levels of income inequality relative to each other. In fact, the results indicate that Black women tend to earn less than Black men over the course of their lives, despite increases in female incomes over the years. This means that even though Black women's earnings have been rising throughout the years studied (1980-2010), Black men's earnings have increased at a faster rate than Black women's. Further, this analysis showed that changes in income vary by nativity status: foreign-born Blacks tend to have higher

median incomes than their U.S.-born counterparts. However, this disparity does not manifest until later ages; younger foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks have similar median incomes. These findings have important implications in light of previous research findings and illustrate economic variability among American Blacks, all of whom are not similarly disadvantaged.

The income gap between Black men and women has been thoroughly documented, and the findings of this dissertation largely support what other studies have found. Research into Black American incomes has consistently shown that although the Black gender gap in income has been narrowing, Black men still earn more than Black women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012; Bowman, 2010). These findings seem puzzling given that, in recent years, Black women as a whole tend to be more educated than Black men (NCES, 2011; McDaniel et al., 2010, Attewell et al., 2004) and call into question the translation of increases in education into better pay for Black women. Were increased education to lead to higher incomes, Black women should have equaled or surpassed the Black male median income. This analysis and prior studies show, however, this has not been the case.

Black men and women face different challenges with regard to income. For instance, studies have suggested that although discriminatory practices hurt both Black men and women, Black male incomes suffer more from these practices than do Black women's. In light of the research about Black American home ownership, these findings about the disparity between Black men and women put data on income and home ownership in context. Undoubtedly, Black women's lower earnings relative to Black men's may be an important factor in their lower overall rates of home ownership over the last few decades. This dissertation has shown that Black female median incomes and home ownership rates have been increasing from 1980 to 2010, which suggests a potential relationship between these occurrences. A more detailed

statistical analysis, however, needs to be performed in order to determine whether or not these factors are related, and if so, to what degree.

As stated, similar to the results on home ownership and college completion, this dissertation finds that there is ethnic variation in Black incomes. These findings are supported by prior research that shows that foreign-born Black Americans tend to have higher median incomes than U.S.-born Blacks. The findings of this dissertation, however, provide a more nuanced view of the differences between these groups. Whereas other studies utilized only single age cohorts (e.g., only 25-34 year olds) or aggregate findings of all ages, this dissertation's findings have accounted for changes over time and between age cohorts. As a result, an interesting pattern emerges: foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks tend to be roughly equal in earlier age cohorts. At later ages, however, a trend of increasing change between the two groups emerges such that later cohorts of foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks differ greatly from each other.

These differing life trajectories for Black ethnic groups raise the question of why there is such a disparity later in life when both groups start out with similar circumstances. Furthermore, this trend has been observed with other variables in this analysis (e.g., home ownership, college completion, labor force participation), suggesting that there may be a relationship between these variables that is driving the differential progression of the two groups. Although this dissertation has elucidated the existence of this trend, it cannot account for the source of the difference between the two groups. Therefore, one suggestion for future research is to explore what is driving this trend and how significant its impact has been on the contrasting development of the Black ethnic groups.

Labor Force Participation

Historically, Black Americans have had lower levels of labor force participation than Whites and other racial groups. The literature on Black participation in the labor force illustrates that different sub-populations of Black Americans have different levels of participation as well as advantages and barriers to entry. This dissertation's analysis focuses on the percentages of Blacks who are outside the labor force (e.g., those who are unemployed). Similar to home ownership, college completion, and income, the findings for the changes in labor force participation over time and throughout age groups have shown that gender and nativity status are important factors for participation. As with the other variables under study, the analysis of Black American labor force participation revealed two trends in participation rates. The first is that Black women are less likely to participate in the labor force than Black men, despite decreases in this disparity in younger cohorts. The second is that, although they have equal rates of participation at younger ages, U.S.-born Blacks are less likely to participate in the labor force over the course of their lives than are foreign-born Blacks.

These results do not support what prior research has found regarding Black labor force participation by gender. The studies reviewed found that greater numbers of Black men than Black women are outside the labor force. Western and Pettit (2005) found that by the end of the 20th century high rates of incarceration among Black men kept more than 20% of them out of the labor force. Similarly, Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen (2005) illustrated that high incarceration rates for Black males aged 16-34 accounted for a large portion of labor force detachment from 1980-2000. Finally, Katz, Stern, and Fader (2005 p. 82) showed that while labor force detachment has decreased for Black women in recent decades, it has been steadily increasing for Black men. They also found that these opposing trends resulted in a greater number of Black

men experiencing labor force detachment by the year 2000 (p. 82). Methodological differences may account for the discrepancy in results between this dissertation and the studies reviewed. First, Western and Pettit (2005) and Holzer et al. (2005) focused on mass incarceration as a contributory factor to low rates of labor force participation among Black men only, not in comparison to Black women. Second, Katz et al. (2005) focused on aggregate statistics from a different source of data. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or not a difference between Black men and women exists, and if so, in which group's favor? The disparity between the dissertation's findings and those of previous studies indicates that more research needs to be performed on the labor force participation rates of Black men and women.

The results of this dissertation also highlight the role that nativity status plays in labor force participation among Black Americans. As stated, the results illustrate a trend in labor force detachment: U.S.-born Blacks become less likely to participate in the labor force at later ages, despite having similar rates at younger ages. These findings support what Suzanne Model found in her 2011 book, *West Indian Blacks: An Immigrant Success Story?*. She compared the relative economic conditions of foreign-born Blacks to U.S.-born Blacks and found that West Indian immigrants participate in the labor force at greater rates than native-born Blacks. Once again, this trend of foreign-born advantage over U.S.-born Blacks is surprising, given that the two groups start out roughly equal at younger age cohorts. This particular trend, however, provides the basis for a possible explanation about why foreign-born Blacks outpace U.S.-born Blacks in socioeconomic success (i.e., home ownership, college completion, income, and poverty status). Indeed, foreign-born Blacks' higher rates of employment and labor force participation may account for their advantages on the other socioeconomic indicators measured in this analysis

(minus college completion rates). This dissertation has only been able to illustrate that these trends exist. More research is needed to determine their causal factors.

Employment

Changes in the Black rate of employment are closely related to Black Americans' labor force participation over time. Similar to trends for labor force participation, employment trends for Black Americans reveal several important patterns: (1) Black women are less likely to be employed at earlier stages in life; (2) the gap in employment rates between Black men and women closes throughout the life course; (3) foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks have equal rates of employment at younger ages; (4) foreign-born Blacks are more likely to be employed than native-born Blacks over the lifespan; and (5) foreign-born Black employment rates were less affected by the Great Recession than U.S.-born Blacks' rates. These results provide further evidence of the socioeconomic variation in the Black population. Furthermore, the trends revealed in this analysis reinforce the findings of the labor force participation analysis, indicating that the overall patterns found in labor force detachment are valid. Finally, because existing research tends to focus on differences between Black and White men and women, rather than exploring differences within the population these findings fill a gap in the literature on Black employment.

None of the reviewed literature focused on the effects of gender and nativity status on Black unemployment, but these five trends can be interpreted through existing sociological theories and concepts. Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1989) explores how the interaction of minority statuses (e.g., in race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) forms social inequality in what later researchers term a "matrix of oppression." According to this theory, different forms of oppression work together to disadvantage members of minority populations.

For instance, compared to Black men, who are disadvantaged by their racial minority status, Black women are doubly disadvantaged by their dual-minority status (gender and racial). As a result, the disparity in employment between younger Black men and women can reasonably be attributed to the effects of Black women's dual-minority status, especially given that Black women have comparable human capital to Black men. This theory alone cannot account for the equalization that occurs later in the life span, though. A more detailed statistical analysis is needed to uncover the factors that influence later corresponding trajectories of Black male and female employment rates.

The concept of a dual-minority status is especially interesting given the effect of nativity status on Black employment rates. Foreign-born Blacks can also be considered a dual minority because of their immigrant status. Instead of hampering them, however, foreign-born Blacks' status has largely been found among all age groups to be a boon to their socioeconomic success relative to native-born Black Americans. Foreign-born Blacks are either on par with native-born Blacks on different socioeconomic measures (e.g., home ownership, labor force participation, and employment) or surpass them (e.g., college completion, income, poverty status). As proposed in the college-completion section, foreign-born Blacks' different rates in employment may stem from the fact that foreign-born Blacks with greater educational and financial means may undergo selective migration to the United States because they can already afford to do so. As a result, the foreign-born population in the United States is more likely to be well-off than its non-migrant counterpart. This initial advantage translates to subsequent socioeconomic advantages that increase as time passes. Moreover, as discussed previously, Black immigrants may achieve greater socioeconomic success because they need not face the same social stigma

and barriers that native-born Blacks experience from the legacy of American racism and discrimination.

None of these theories or possible explanations, however, account for the contrasting effect of the Great Recession on U.S.-born Blacks. In fact, foreign-born Blacks were found to have *increased* their employment rates during the Great Recession, while native-born Blacks suffered job losses. As was the case with the equalization of employment rates in Black men and women, a more robust statistical analysis is needed to uncover the factors underlying the differential impact of the Great Recession on foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks.

Poverty Status

Four trends emerged from this dissertation's analysis, which showed that gender and nativity status are influential factors in the differential poverty rates of Black Americans. The two gender-related trends illustrate contrasting likelihoods and trajectories for Black men and women in poverty. Although the findings show that Black men are less likely to be in poverty than Black women in each of the study's age cohorts and time periods, the analysis demonstrates that Black women are actually moving *out* of poverty over the course of their lives while Black men remain in it. Part of the reason that Black women are moving out of poverty, may be due to household size; Black women are having fewer children than previous cohorts and therefore have fewer economic responsibilities. These results partially confirm what prior research has found about Black American poverty rates by gender, but they also add a new perspective to the existing literature. In reviewing Black female-headed households, in particular, the studies reviewed found that the growth in these types of households is correlated with an increase in poverty for Black Americans (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Albrecht, 2000; Laster, 1997). Further,

Ezeala-Harrison (2010) illustrated that despite having similar employment rates and comparable education, Black women have higher poverty rates than Black men.

These studies, combined with the findings of this dissertation, indicate that Black women, particularly those who are the head of a household, are more likely to live in poverty than Black men. The findings also correspond with the feminization of poverty that has occurred in recent decades and has disproportionately affected Black Americans (Gane-McCalla, 2011; Ezeala-Harrison, 2010; McLanahan & Kelly, 2006). This disparity has been posited to occur so predominately in Black women because of two interrelated factors: (1) the low marriage rates among Black females as a whole, but particularly low-income Black women, and (2) Black women face a gap in income (or are more likely to live in poverty than Black men) because there is inequality between Black women and Black men.

Paul Attewell and associates (2004) documented the problem that low marriage rates pose for the Black middle class. Because household incomes are pooled in marriages, married couples have an advantage in remaining middle class (p. 9-10) or becoming middle class (when combining two smaller incomes). The same concept applies for poorer Black households. Without the benefit of two shared incomes, the entire burden of household expenses falls to the female head of household. Further, because minority status disadvantages Black women to work less and earn less than Black men, Black females may have less financially than their male counterparts to work with from the beginning.

Although none of the studies reviewed found similar results, the trend of Black women moving out of poverty throughout their life spans makes sense in the context of other findings of this analysis. If Black women are increasingly reaching parity with Black men on socioeconomic indicators such as employment and median incomes, then it makes sense that these

advancements would translate to decreases in poverty levels over the same span of time. This dissertation's other findings also help provide an indication as to why Black men remain in poverty as their female counterparts move out. On four out of five of the other economic indicators included in this analysis, Black men's rates either remained stagnant or increased very little relative to Black women's. As a result, their rates of poverty may not experience much change either throughout the life course. Because this analysis did not measure the relationships between the variables of interest, further research is needed to determine whether other indicators in this analysis are contributory factors toward Black men's stagnant poverty rates.

Finally, the results of this analysis also showed two trends in Black American poverty rates that are related to nativity status. As with three of the other variables of interest in this analysis, results show that foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks have roughly equal poverty rates in younger cohorts, but that foreign-born Blacks have lower poverty rates across the life span. These findings support those of an earlier study of foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks' socioeconomic standings, which found that Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean have the lowest rates of poverty among Black Americans (Logan & Deane, 2003). Taken together, the results of the prior study and this dissertation indicate that foreign-born Blacks are less economically disadvantaged than their U.S.-born counterparts, and, as a result, they are able to retain their economic well-being easier than native-born Blacks.

Indeed, the results also illustrate that the Great Recession had a disproportionately negative effect on U.S.-born Blacks. While foreign-born Blacks actually decreased their poverty rates during the Great Recession, U.S.-born Blacks experienced a rise in poverty rates. These results are surprising given the large economic toll that the Great Recession had on Black Americans, pushing a greater number of Black families into poverty level. Foreign-born Blacks'

relative socioeconomic advantage illustrates, however, that not all Black Americans were similarly affected by the recent economic downturn. Because of this, future research should take into account variations in Black American socioeconomic trajectories.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The results discussed in the previous chapter support three main themes that this research uncovered regarding Black socioeconomic status throughout the study period. These themes reveal that (1) overall, foreign-born Blacks tend to perform better than U.S.-born Blacks throughout the life span on all socioeconomic indicators, (2) Black men fare better than Black women on most indicators, and (3) although Black women have been underperforming compared with Black men historically, in recent years, they have been closing the gap for each socioeconomic indicator. These results also highlight that many of these trends are in flux for Black Americans in recent years and are changing the socioeconomic portrait of Black America. Therefore, the findings of this research support the conception that it no longer makes sense to speak of a single socioeconomic trajectory for Black Americans, but, instead, there are a series of socioeconomic trajector*ies* for different Black sub-populations.

Summary of Findings

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to add to the discourse about Black socioeconomic mobility in the U.S. by analyzing the differing trajectories of Black sub-populations throughout the lifespan and over time. To that end, this dissertation has succeeded in revealing differing socioeconomic trajectories for each age group in the study throughout the life course and during each time period on six different socioeconomic indicators.

The most revealing finding of this study was that foreign-born Blacks tend to fare better than U.S.-born Blacks throughout the life course on *all* economic indicators used in the analysis. This finding is particularly important given that Black immigrants comprise a significant component of the Black middle class. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is important that this group's socioeconomic standing be addressed separately and that further investigation be conducted into the causes and consequences of the high economic achievement of this group. Further, that Black immigrant groups so far outperform their native-born counterparts economically demonstrates that nativity status can actually provide an advantage to socioeconomic development.

Although the magnitude of the difference between U.S.- and foreign-born Blacks has not been quantified by this dissertation, the variation in their rates on each indicator is particularly telling. For example, foreign-born Black college completion rates have been shown to increase substantially throughout their lives, while U.S.-born Blacks make gains at a much lower rate. The difference in lifelong gains between the groups at the oldest age cohort (55-64) is nearly two-fold (18% for U.S.-born and 32% for foreign-born). Furthermore, the analysis showed that foreign-born Blacks similarly outpace U.S.-born Blacks in later age cohorts in median income, labor force participation, home ownership, poverty status, and employment. In other words, as they age, foreign-born Blacks make significant socioeconomic gains while U.S.-born Blacks increase their rates of growth much more slowly.

That foreign-born Blacks began nearly equal with U.S.-born Blacks on these indicators is encouraging, given the extent of the disparity between the two groups later in life. It indicates that, at least for certain portions of the Black population, social mobility is not only possible but is very likely. Moreover, perhaps with more research, the factors that lead foreign-born Blacks to

such a high level of socioeconomic status can be utilized to benefit U.S.-born Blacks and improve the trajectory of their socioeconomic development.

The results of this research indicate that Black men have historically had a substantial socioeconomic advantage over Black women. For instance, the results show that Black men's incomes were nearly double that of Black women's in prior decades (roughly 42% higher in 1990) and continue to be much higher in the present day. Further, the analysis found that Black men have also outpaced Black women's socioeconomic gains in labor force participation, employment, home ownership, and poverty status over the last three decades, and continue to do so in recent years. In other words, Black women have historically fared much worse from a socioeconomic standpoint than have Black men.

More encouragingly, however, the results also show that Black women have been making great gains at reaching parity with Black men. On each economic indicator used in the study, Black women made serious gains toward matching Black men's rates of growth, and even outpaced Black men's rates in some instances (such as in college completion rates). Additionally, Black women's gains in moving out of poverty and becoming home owners are particularly encouraging, given that this group has been quite disadvantaged in the past and that these are important factors for socioeconomic stability and wealth-building. Taken together, the socioeconomic trajectories for Black men and women throughout the decades are simultaneously heartening and concerning. The gains that Black women have made are encouraging indicators of economic progress. Given, however, that Black men's gains have been for the most part minimal during the same time period, it remains to be seen whether or not these gains will continue or stagnate once they reach equality with Black men's.

Conversely, that Black men and women both become progressively more economically stable as they age is an important sign for the continued development of the Black middle class. Although most of the results indicate that the gains for each sub-population have not been rapid, most of the socioeconomic trajectories uncovered in this study have been positive, which signals that incremental and favorable change has been occurring in Black sub-groups and a large segment are upwardly mobile. This dissertation, then, is an important first step toward increasing a nuanced understanding of Black Americans' economic standing. Their economic standing will, one hopes, translate into more stability for the Black middle class.

Research Limitations

Although this dissertation succeeds with respect to its stated purpose, several limitations with the data, methodology, variables, and research questions restrict what the findings of the analysis show and what conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. These limitations are related and overlap because each aspect of the research process informs another. They are also a result of the ways in which this dissertation is more nuanced than most previous research. As a result, the conclusions from the analysis are tentative. Finally, these limitations highlight the need for further research with Black sub-populations.

Data

One potential limitation of this dissertation results from the use of Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) and American Community Survey (ACS) data for the analysis. Because these datasets are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, they do not allow for the analysis of the *same* group of people over a period of time. Instead, the

data conveys information about the groups under study (i.e., Black men, Black women, foreign-born and U.S.-born Blacks) at certain points in time (i.e., in the Census years 1980, 1990, 2000, etc.). This dissertation addresses this limitation by utilizing synthetic age cohort analysis and that the data is nationally-representative to gather information and draw conclusions about cohorts of Black Americans over time and through their life spans. Because the composition of the cohorts over time may change enough to be different from one another on certain characteristics, however, the results generated by this analysis may be quantitatively different than that derived from longitudinal data.

Further, the use of cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal data requires that newer groups of foreign-born Blacks of the same age cohort be eliminated from the analysis to ensure that the composition of the cohorts being compared is similar. Although this process is important for maintaining the accuracy of this dissertation's analysis, it also excludes a potentially important group of people from the analysis. While the analysis found that foreign-born Blacks diverge from U.S.-born Blacks on each socioeconomic indicator throughout their lifespan, this can only be said to be true for the foreign-born who were actually included in the cohort. Indeed, newer arrivals of foreign-born Blacks may repeat this pattern of divergence from native-born Blacks, but it is also possible that more recent foreign-born Black individuals may more closely resemble native-born Blacks as they age.

One reason for this difference may be the ages at which the migration to the United States occurs. For example, a 35 year-old foreign-born Black American who has been in the United States for 11 or more years may have a different outlook than one who has just migrated. Another reason for this could be that immigrants attempting to establish themselves in the United States at a different time may have a socioeconomic standing different than their same-age

counterparts who migrated earlier. Nevertheless, this limitation affects how the results of this dissertation can be interpreted.

Although the use of longitudinal data may have produced different results for this dissertation's analysis, its use was impeded by the lack of comprehensive and nationally-representative datasets that include socioeconomic information for Black Americans that can also be disaggregated by both gender and nativity status. Until better datasets are developed the synthetic age cohort used in this analysis, despite its limitations, is the best answer to a lack of available data.

Variables

The variables chosen for inclusion in this analysis are significant because they have been shown by prior research to be important factors social mobility and socioeconomic growth. As a result, their inclusion reveals a portrait of the economic standing of different Black sub-populations. Yet, two limitations in the conclusions drawn from this dissertation's results result from the way that the variables were coded for the analysis.

The first limitation results from the use of gender and nativity as variables but not the interaction of these factors. As a result, this dissertation is useful for detailing the social mobility of Black groups *either* by nativity or gender. Interaction theory, however, posits these factors do not exist independently of one another. Therefore, to explore the differing trajectories of Black sub-populations, the effect of being both foreign-born and female must be explored in addition to that of being U.S.-born and male, foreign-born and male, etc. Neglecting to include this interaction does not impede the ability to answer the research question, but it results in an analysis with less detailed findings.

Similarly, the treatment of some variables as dichotomous makes the analysis less detailed. Although it does make sense to code certain variables dichotomous to maintain the parsimony of the analytical model (e.g., employment and labor force participation), it makes the analysis less specific than it could be. For example, treating poverty as dichotomous projects an overall image of how certain sub-populations fare on this indicator, but it glosses over other important aspects, such as whether those who are moving out of poverty remain near the brink of poverty or are moving up to working- or middle-class status. As a result, the general picture of Black American social mobility in this analysis is incomplete.

These limitations therefore raise the question of whether or not these results by themselves can adequately detail which Black sub-populations experienced the most social mobility in the study period. This dissertation is a good starting point for deconstructing the view of a Black monolith, but future research needs to go further in taking into account the interaction between Black sub-population variables as well as the particular meaning of socioeconomic indicators.

Methodology

The use of cross-sectional data in the analysis created methodological limitations for studying sub-populations. Because cross-sectional data only conveys information about cohorts at given points in time, the causes and effects of observed changes cannot be explored, and contributory factors cannot be examined. For instance, this study cannot account for the increasing difference in the socioeconomic trajectories of foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks for the variables studied. The stated purpose of this dissertation is to explore the social mobility of these cohorts over time rather than the sources of the disparity, and so this is not a *true* limitation of

the study. Instead, this dissertation can be considered an important starting point for more in-depth study about the changes observed in this analysis.

Nevertheless, the use of synthetic cohorts also limited the accuracy of the changes observed between cohorts, as mentioned previously. Because the cohorts have been created for use in the analysis, it may be said that observed changes are due to other influences or difference between groups. Further, using synthetic cohorts to track social mobility among Black Americans is problematic because an analysis of synthetic cohorts cannot account for differences between the study groups prior to the time period or age studied. For instance, this analysis showed that foreign-born Blacks complete college educations at higher rates than U.S.-born Blacks and that this difference increases as cohorts age. Characteristic differences between the groups at the high school and college level, however, may influence the analysis, which starts at age 25. This limitation may be addressed in two ways. First, if available, longitudinal data may be used to account for differences prior to the time period of interest (in the case of college completion, this would be high school and college completion). Second, other age cohorts, such as a 15-24 age cohort, may be added to the analysis to account for these differences.

In addition to the methodological limitations created by the use of cross-sectional data, this analysis was constrained by the statistical methods used. Since only univariate analyses were employed in this dissertation, the magnitude of the changes that were observed cannot be quantified. This limitation did not cause issues with answering the research question; it just made the answer provided by the analysis less detailed than it could have been. For instance, the results of the analysis show that one cohort of foreign-born Blacks had a median income of $32,409 in 2010, compared to $21,572 for U.S.-born Blacks. Although this disparity appears to be large (the U.S.-born figure is 66% of the foreign-born income), the analysis cannot determine if the

difference between these two groups' incomes is statistically significant. Recent work by Lin et al. (2011), however, highlights issues with statistical significance with large datasets, particularly that small differences can be statistically significant in very large datasets, and implores researchers to rely on the practical significance of results. Of course, statistical significance is not the fundamental goal of this research, but adding a second layer of analysis could help establish which Black sub-groups are most/least disadvantaged, as well as focus on the socioeconomic indicators with the most disparate results. Adding statistical significance would enhance the narrative of Black social mobility by adding a level of specificity to the findings.

Research questions

In addition to the limitations imposed by the use of cross-sectional data and the employment of this particular statistical methodology, the research questions that frame this dissertation can be considered limiting as well. As stated previously, the objective of this dissertation was to track the social mobility of Black sub-populations over time. This research question limits the scope of the analysis to exploratory and descriptive research, which restricts what type of information will be produced by this dissertation. Because of the broad nature of the research question and the methodology used to answer it, it is difficult to hone in on specific results that future researchers should pick up to investigate further, since no distinction is made between significant and non-significant findings.

Moreover, this dissertation asks how do Black men and women as well as foreign-born and U.S.-born Blacks vary on each socioeconomic variable included in the analysis. In the context of furthering the existing knowledge about Black socioeconomic trajectories over the life span and throughout the last thirty years, this research question functions well to produce the

information needed. These data can only describe the changes that have taken place in each of the sub-populations rather than inferring anything about these changes and how they relate to each other and to the broader socioeconomic climate of the United States.

Further, the research question as posed makes it difficult to contextualize the findings of the analysis without a metric against which different Black socioeconomic trajectories can be measured. In other words, what this study lacks is a comparison group. The need for such becomes clear in the context of specific findings. For example, the analysis showed that foreign-born Blacks own homes at higher rates than U.S.-born Blacks at later ages (67% and 59%, respectively) and that Black men own more homes than Black women (48% and 39%, respectively). Taken by themselves, it is difficult to gauge how each group fares in the overall picture of the United States economy. When compared to the average White home ownership figure of 74.4% for 2010, however, it becomes clearer that foreign-born Blacks are the most advantaged of the groups and that Black women have substantially low rates of home ownership.

Although the focus of this analysis is to tell the "Black American story," other racial groups could still be included in the analysis to ground the results without losing sight of the focus of the analysis. Further, it can be argued that the inclusion of another race as a socioeconomic barometer, though often used in research to disparage and pathologize Blacks, can alternatively be used to celebrate the advancement of various Black sub-groups. Overall, this dissertation succeeds in adding nuance to the monolithic view of Black American social mobility. Some measure is needed to give the analysis some context, however, whether by adding a higher level of statistical analysis to establish significant findings, or by adding a comparison group. As such, the results of this dissertation can provide a detailed view of Black American social

mobility that clearly delineates the differences between the Black sub-groups' socioeconomic trajectories.

Sociopolitical Implications

The results of this dissertation also have sociopolitical implications for Black Americans and the United States as a whole. Prior research has shown that voting behaviors and socioeconomic status are linked: those with higher socioeconomic standing tend to be more civically engaged because of greater access to resources and opportunities, while people of lower economic means tend to be more apathetic toward politics (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Walsh, Jennings, & Stoker, 2004; Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy, 2005). As a result, the groups with the greatest amount of political leverage tend to be those of individuals with greater financial means, and this political power is instrumental in maintaining their socioeconomic stability. For a group that has historically been grossly underrepresented in national politics and because of the legacy of slavery, segregation, and discrimination has disproportionately experienced poverty and unemployment, it is clear that the trend toward greater socioeconomic standing has great importance for its sociopolitical engagement and social mobility.

It is easy to imagine that as sectors of Black America become upwardly mobile, the United States may see an increase in the political engagement of these Black sub-populations. Further, as these groups become more civically active, the different concerns and interests of Black Americans may play a larger role in national politics and hold more weight in future elections. This civic activism has important consequences for both continuing the growth of social mobility for Black Americans (through policy changes and the like), as well as increasing representation for Black Americans in the government. The socioeconomic advancement of certain sub-populations of Black Americans is also important because research has found that

socioeconomic status is related to partisan voting behaviors. Generally, those of higher socioeconomic status tend to vote Republican whereas poorer individuals tend to vote Democratic (Pew Center, 2009). Given that Black Americans have historically voted Democratic since the Southern Strategy of the late 1960s, it will be interesting to examine the impact of increasing parity with Whites on the voting habits of Black American sub-populations.

An important example of the interaction of Black Americans' improved socioeconomic standing, political engagement, and issues of race, gender, and nativity is the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama, a mixed-race but self-identified Black American. This election was historically significant for many reasons, including his racial identification, issues of his citizenship, and voter turnout of historically low-participating voting groups and substantial voting blocs. In particular, Obama's racial identification and election signified to many Americans that Black Americans had officially "made it." In other words, with the election of the first Black president, many concluded that the United States had entered a "post-racial" period, where race was no longer a significant hindrance to success. The controversies and rhetoric surrounding his campaign and subsequent election tell a much different story, however. Barack Obama's racial identification in a "post-racial" America illustrates the continuing significance of race in American life, which is particularly clear in light of the racialized rhetoric surrounding Obama's campaign and election. The significant role that race plays in how Obama is viewed is particularly evident through the association of his race with his political platform and viewpoints by his detractors. For instance, one of the most glaring examples of the primacy of Obama's race is that he is often referred to as the "Food Stamp President." The use of this particular moniker reveals the worry among certain segments of the U.S. population that so-called "Black issues" would predominate in Obama's presidency.

More important, however, this designation conflates race and class and erases the socioeconomic differences between Obama and Black Americans as a whole. Given that Obama, a Harvard Law School graduate, is clearly not of the same socioeconomic status as those for whom access to food stamps and other public assistance is crucial, the association reflects the tendency of Americans to view Black Americans as a monolith and equate Blackness with poverty. Further, the idea that food stamps in particular and public assistance in general are a main concern of Black American voting groups reinforces the idea that there is a singular Black socioeconomic trajectory rather than the variation that this present study and previous research has demonstrated. Such rhetoric and the ideas that underscore it highlight the need for a greater examination of socioeconomic variation among Black Americans, as well as how this dissimilarity influences voting behaviors.

Another significant issue regarding Obama's election that is relevant to the present study is the controversy over Obama's nativity status. Throughout his campaign against John McCain, and even after he had won the presidency, Barack Obama's citizenship in the United States was called into question and challenged by "Birthers," those who believe that Obama was not born in the United States and thus was ineligible for presidential candidacy. Interestingly, the same was not done for John McCain, who was actually born in Panama (although on a U.S. military base). Although racial discrimination was the main sentiment underlying this movement to question the legitimacy of the President, the form it took highlights the interaction of race and nativity status in the United States.

His election also illustrates how Black Americans, effectively mobilized, can become a significant political force. The 2008 election saw an unprecedented level of voter participation from Black Americans, who have historically had low civic engagement and voter turnout rates

(McKee & Hill, 2009). In fact, compared with the 2004 election, Black Americans in general experienced an 8% increase in voters (the greatest increase of any group), while Black women had the highest voter turnout of the election, which contributed greatly to Obama's victory (Lopez, 2009).

Many theories have been put forth to explain the high voter turnout for Black Americans in the 2008 election, but the main point of its inclusion in this analysis is to highlight the sociopolitical potential for the growing number of upwardly mobile Black Americans. As their socioeconomic standing increases, Black Americans may be motivated to participate further in the political process by voting and holding political office. Research has found that Black-run cities experience rates of Black voter turnout that exceed the White rate (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990). Therefore, it is important that future research considers the impact of socioeconomic indicators as well as the presence of Black elected officials on Black voting behavior.

Areas for Future Research

This dissertation represents a first step in detailing the social mobility of Black Americans in the last few decades. More than that, it presents a view of Black socioeconomic trajectories that is complex and changing for each of the Black sub-populations studied. This research does not address every aspect of the topic, and so future research can further analyze the findings of this study as well as concentrate on both its limitations and the sociopolitical implications of its findings. Directions for future studies are discussed below.

Future studies should further explore the policy implications of the splintering of Black populations over the last four decades. Robinson (2010) argues that the Black population is no longer a monolithic whole and that it has splintered into different groups (based on education,

income, and nativity). He argues that the interests and claims of Black Americans are vastly different based on these groups and that any sociopolitical change needs to take account of this.

One area of this study that greatly needs further analysis is the trend of foreign-born Blacks increasingly outpacing the socioeconomic growth of U.S.-born Blacks as they age. This finding is striking, given that it occurs for each economic indicator in the analysis and that the two groups start out relatively equal at younger age cohorts. Future research could try to determine what is driving the increasing difference between the two groups. It could examine, for example, whether the source of the change is the influence of one or more of the included variables (such as college completion) on other variables or whether it is another factor not considered in this analysis. The findings of such research will have important implications for potentially addressing the relatively lower socioeconomic improvement of U.S.-born Blacks. Moreover, the other area that deserves further analysis is the economic growth patterns of Black males and females. Because the findings show that Black males fare better overall but have not had the same socioeconomic gains as Black women in recent years, future research could examine whether Black male social mobility has stalled.

Further, as stated in the previous section, future research should merge the two-fold analysis used in this study to examine the effect of the interaction of gender and nativity on Black American's socioeconomic trajectories. Instead of analyzing groups of Black men and women and foreign- and U.S.-born Blacks, the new analysis would compare U.S.-born Black men and women to foreign-born Black men and women. Given the differing rates of mobility found in the current study, subsequent studies could use the interaction of the two factors to detail the socioeconomic trajectories of Black Americans and determine which groups are the most/least advantaged.

The main limitations of this dissertation stem from the use of cross-sectional data and only descriptive statistical analysis, as well as a lack of context for the findings. As a result, there are several ways that future research can build upon and improve what was done in this study. First, regarding the use of the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) and American Community Survey (ACS) data, future research *could* improve upon this study by utilizing longitudinal data, but with longitudinal data for the chosen socioeconomic indicators and time period (1980-2010) unavailable for the Black population, the synthetic cohort analysis used in this study remains the best method for conducting such an analysis.

Future research should utilize more detailed statistical analysis for determining the how much socioeconomic change has occurred for each Black sub-population. A more robust statistical analysis would allow for greater detail in the examination of the change in social mobility for Black Americans for the last three decades. For instance, building upon the work in this study, subsequent studies could determine if significant differences exist between the groups on the socioeconomic measures, which would identify on which variables the greatest change has occurred between the groups. Furthermore, the same method could be used to establish whether the changes in social mobility that have taken place over time are significant. Adding this level of detail to the analysis will provide a clearer picture of the *extent* of the difference in the socioeconomic trajectories of the different Black sub-populations.

Moreover, additional research is needed to examine the effect of changes in socioeconomic status on Black voting behavior. Prior research has already established that higher socioeconomic statuses are related to greater political participation, and this study has illustrated that certain segments of the Black population are upwardly mobile. Therefore, the

sociopolitical implications of this changing status for Black Americans should be examined by gender, nativity status, and the interaction of the two.

Conclusion

This dissertation is important for the information that it adds to the discourse about Black Americans' directions for social mobility. In contrast to much previous research, this study focuses on Black sub-populations, which have been largely overlooked, as the basis for its analysis, rather than Black Americans as a whole. In doing so, it highlights the differing socioeconomic trajectories that these groups have taken and illustrates the need for a comprehensive review of the differing economic barriers and advantages that each sub-group faces. This dissertation serves as an impetus for further research to enhance and refine the findings of this study, to improve the existing body of knowledge of Black social mobility, and promote improved conditions among Black American sub-populations.

Figure 1. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

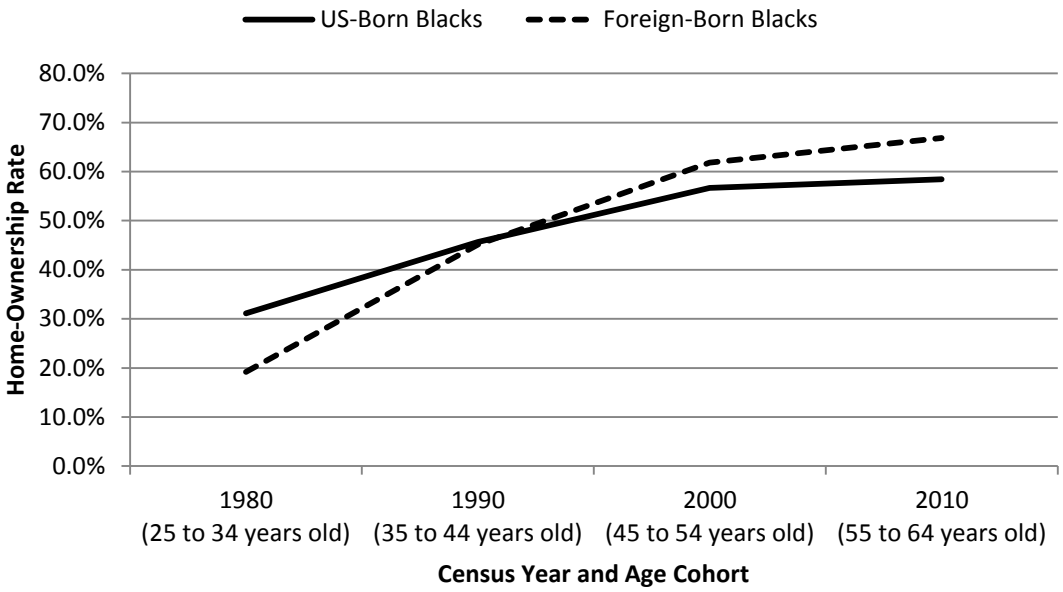


Figure 2. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

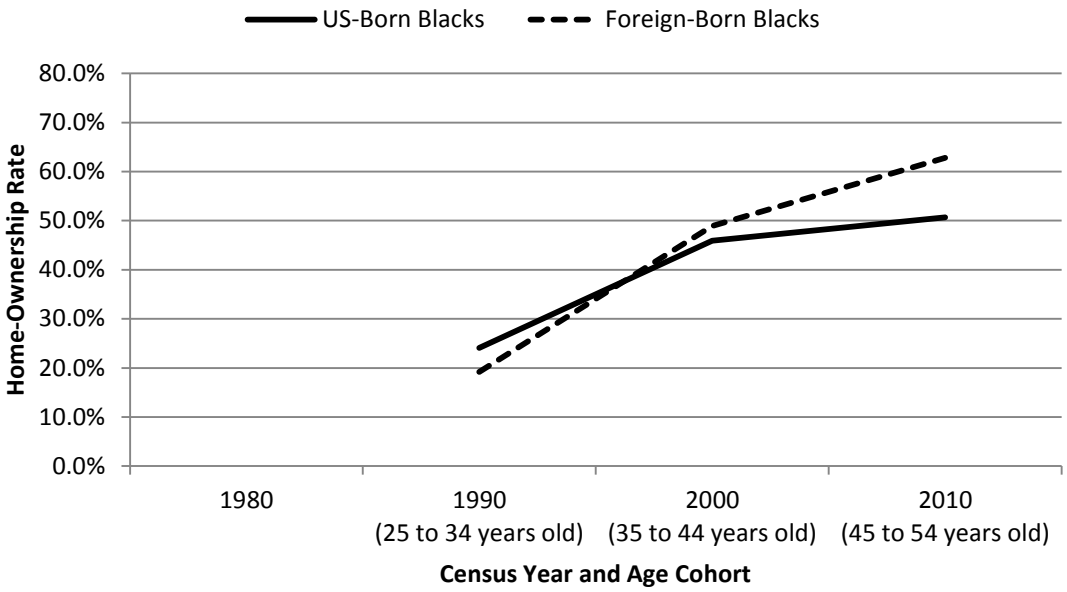


Figure 3. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 2000-2010

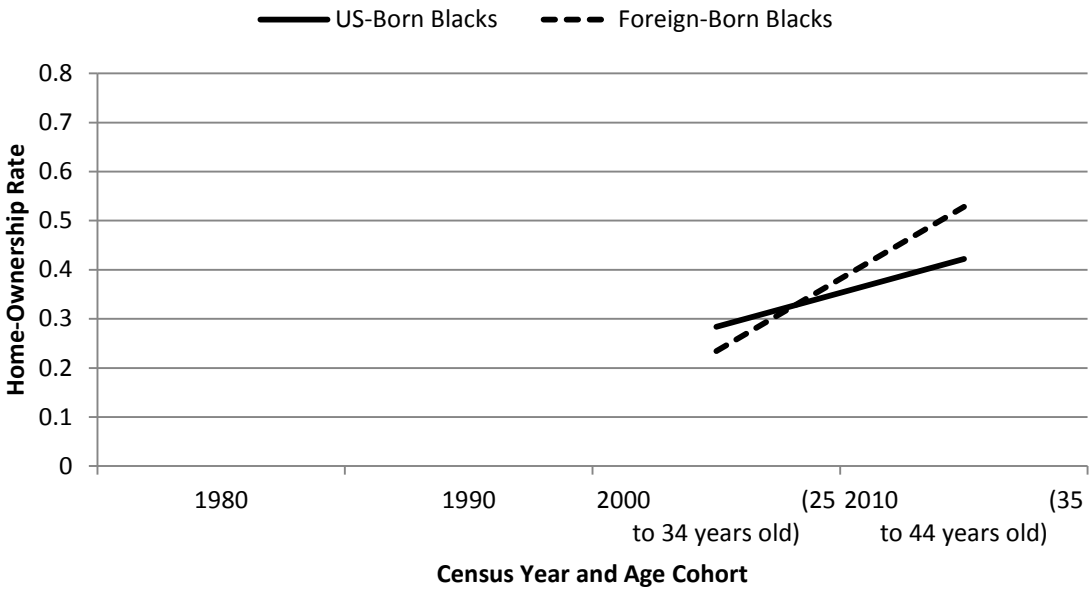


Figure 4. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

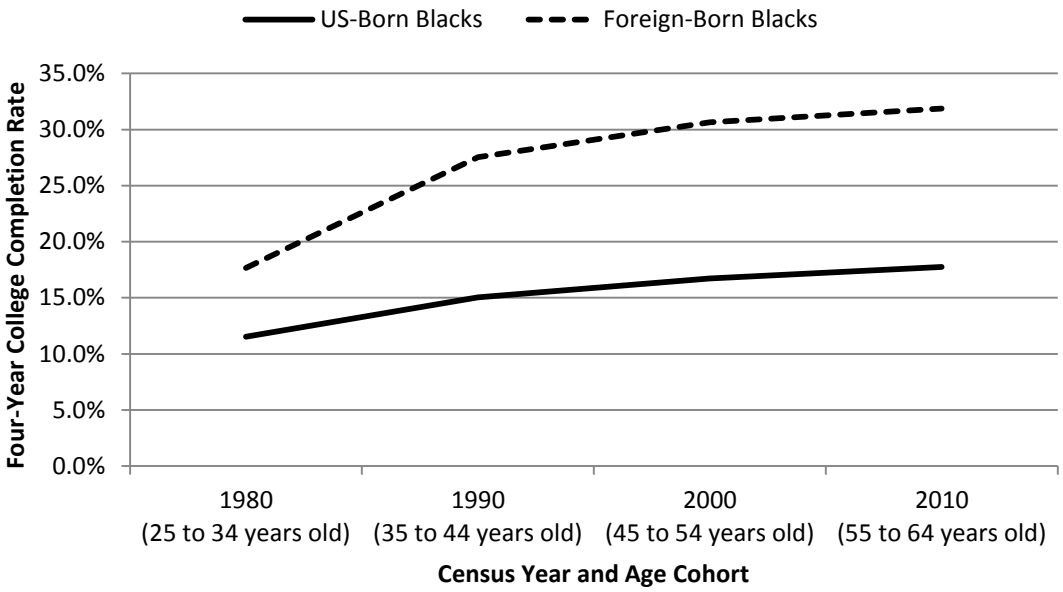


Figure 5. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

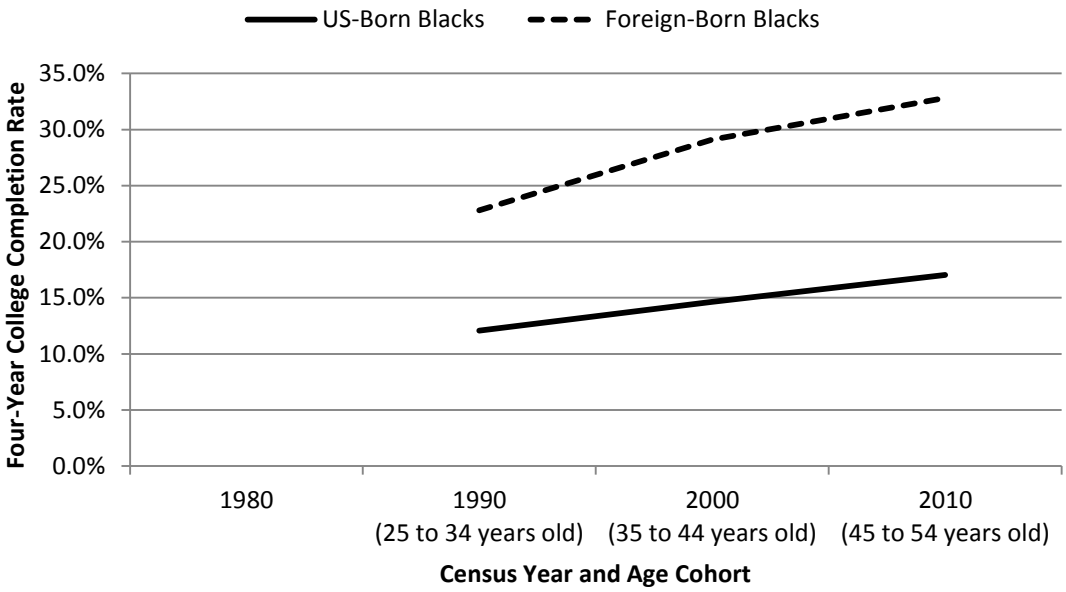


Figure 6. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 2000-2010

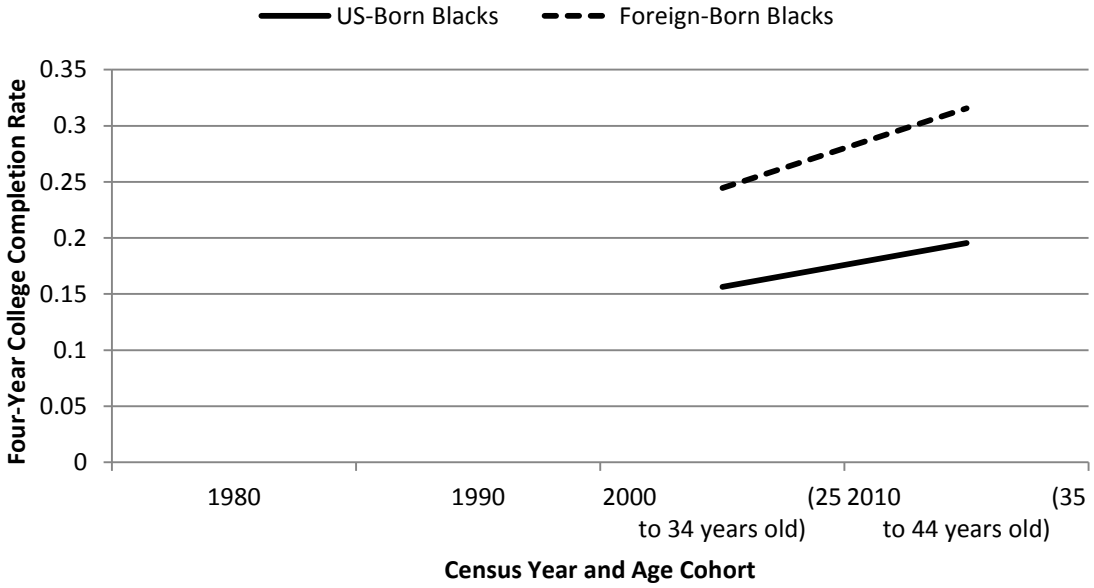


Figure 7. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

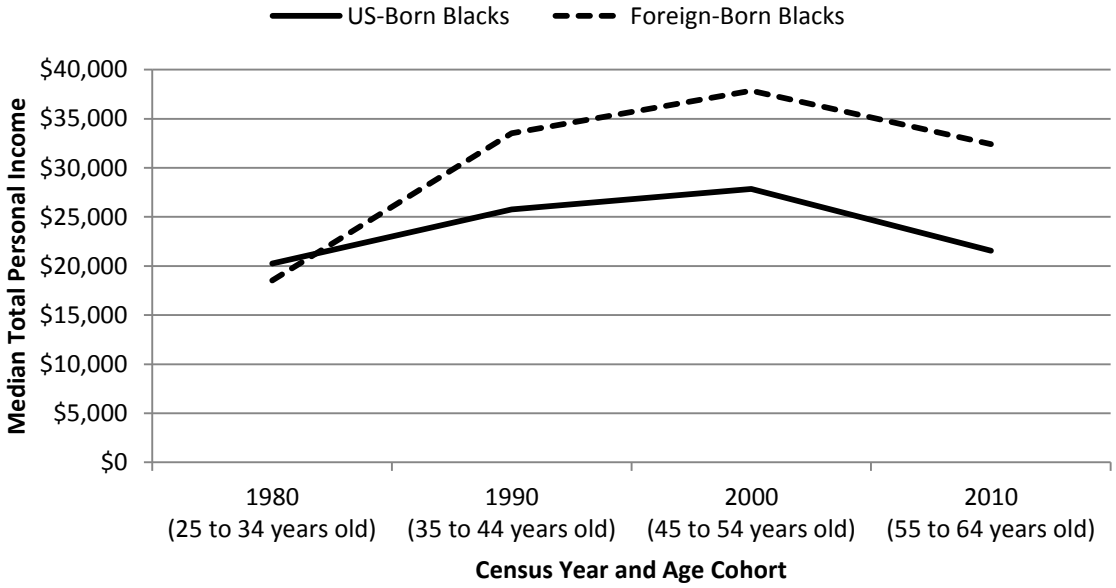


Figure 8. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

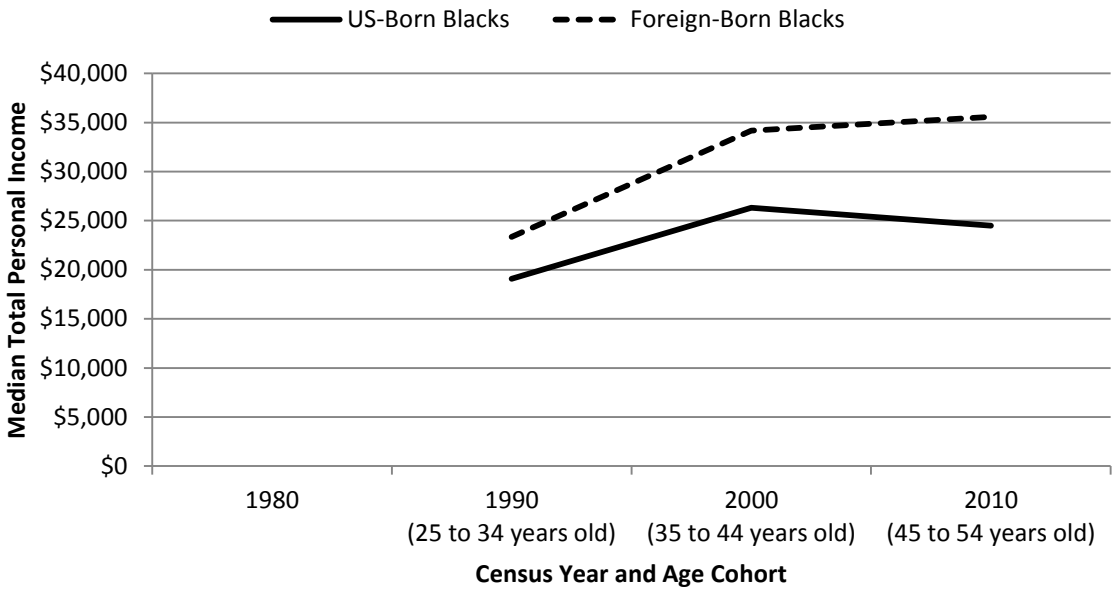
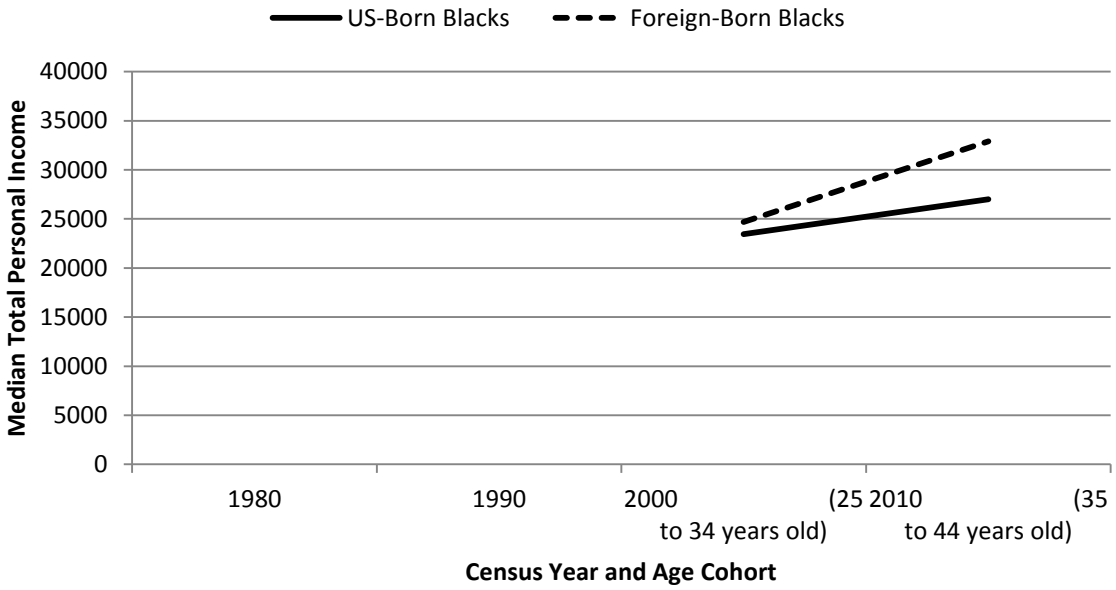


Figure 9. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 2000-2010



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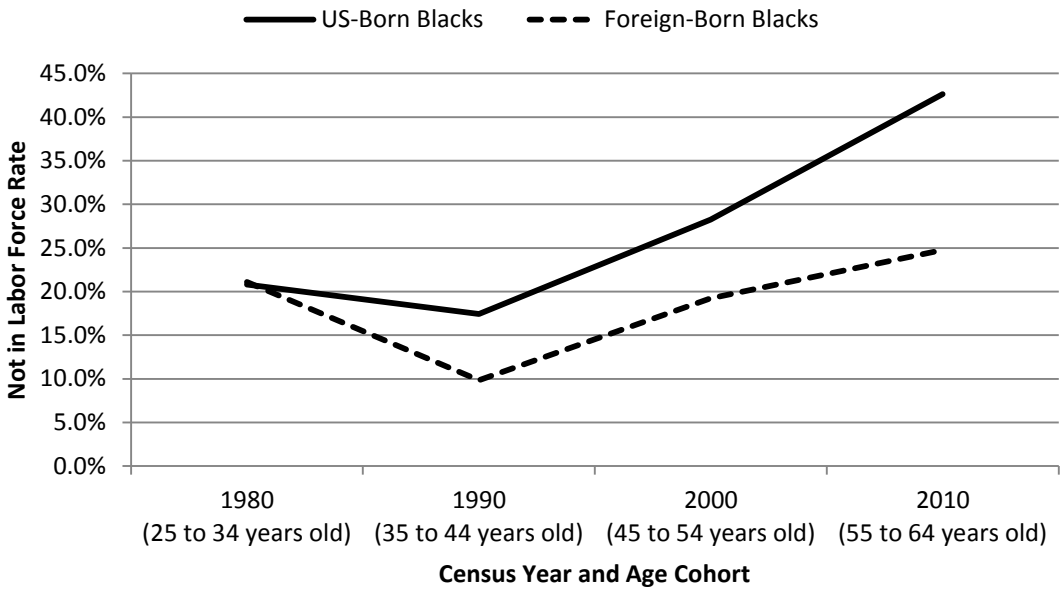
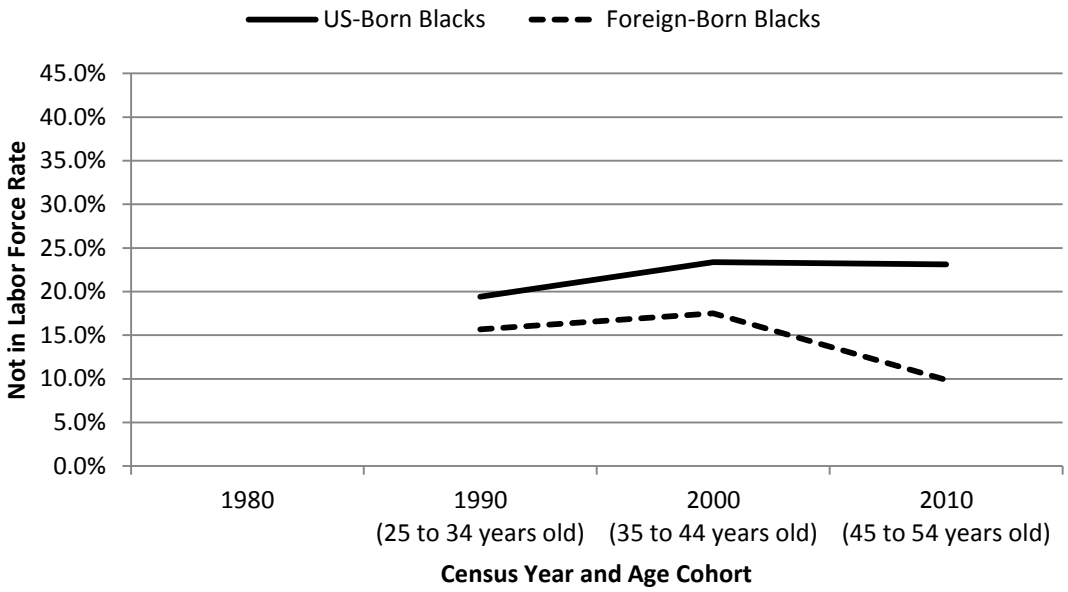


Figure 11. Not in Labor Force Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010



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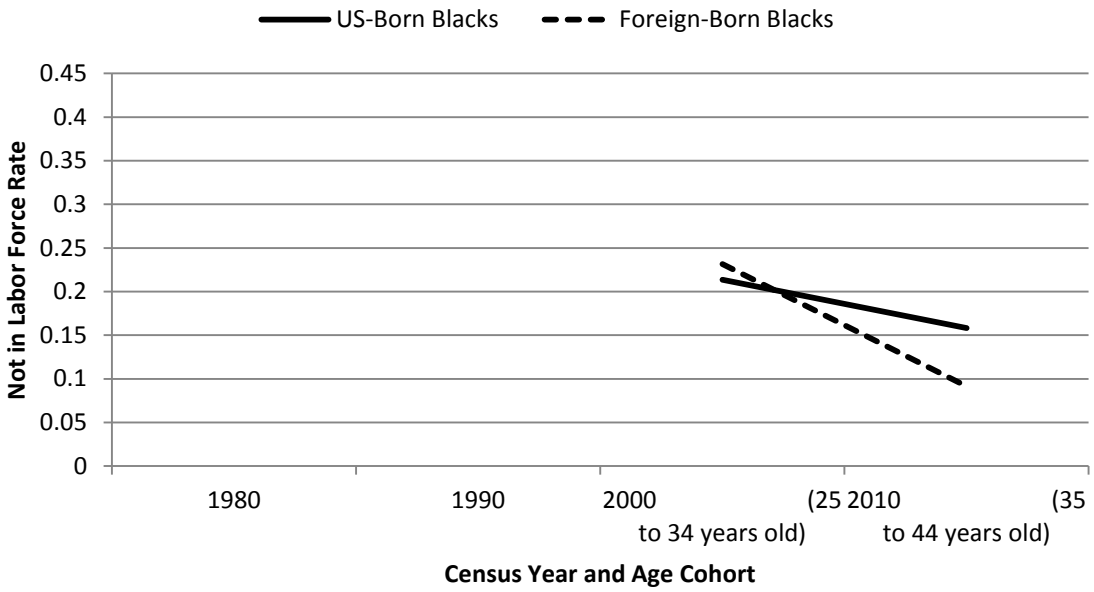


Figure 13. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

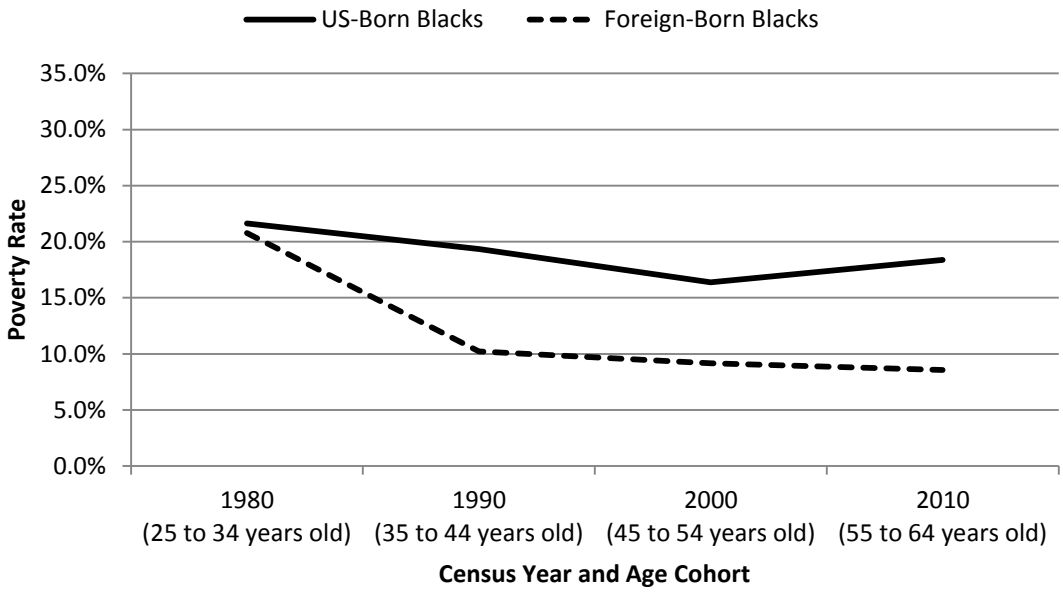


Figure 14. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

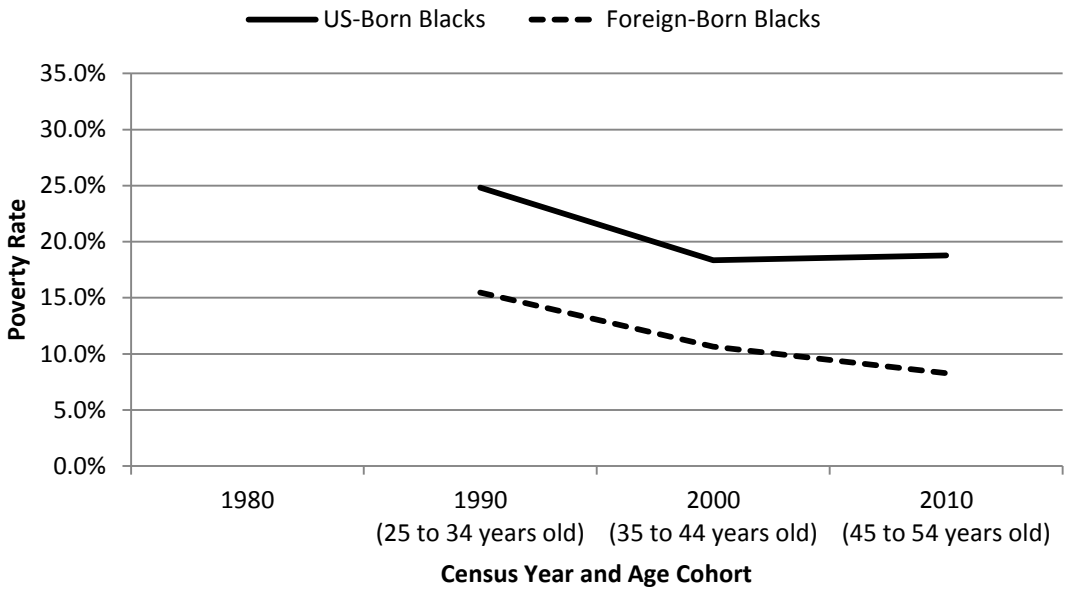


Figure 15. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 2000-2010

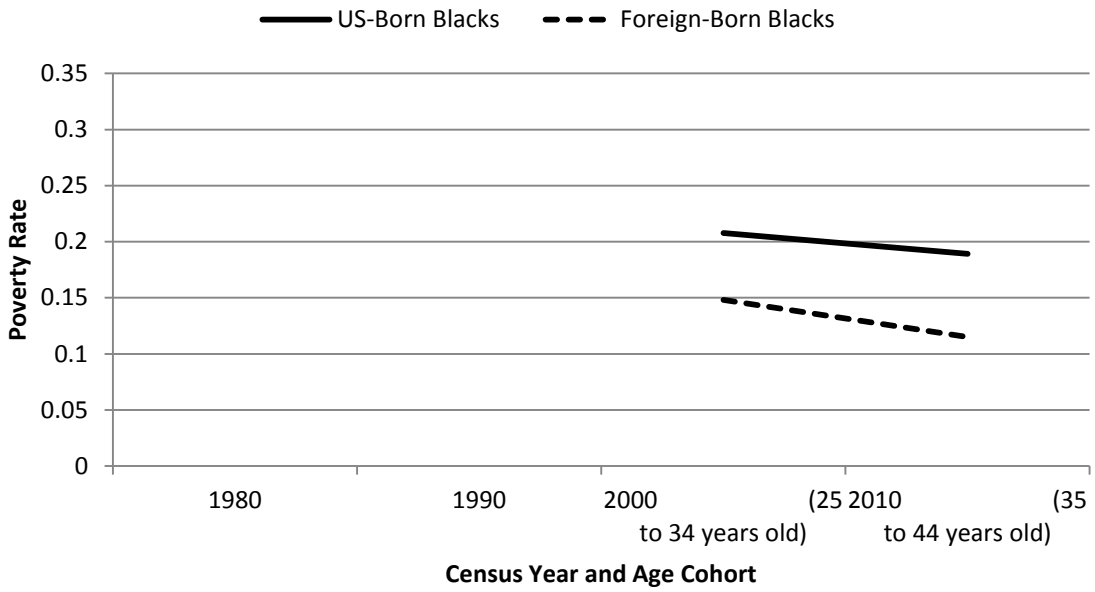


Figure 16. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1980-2010

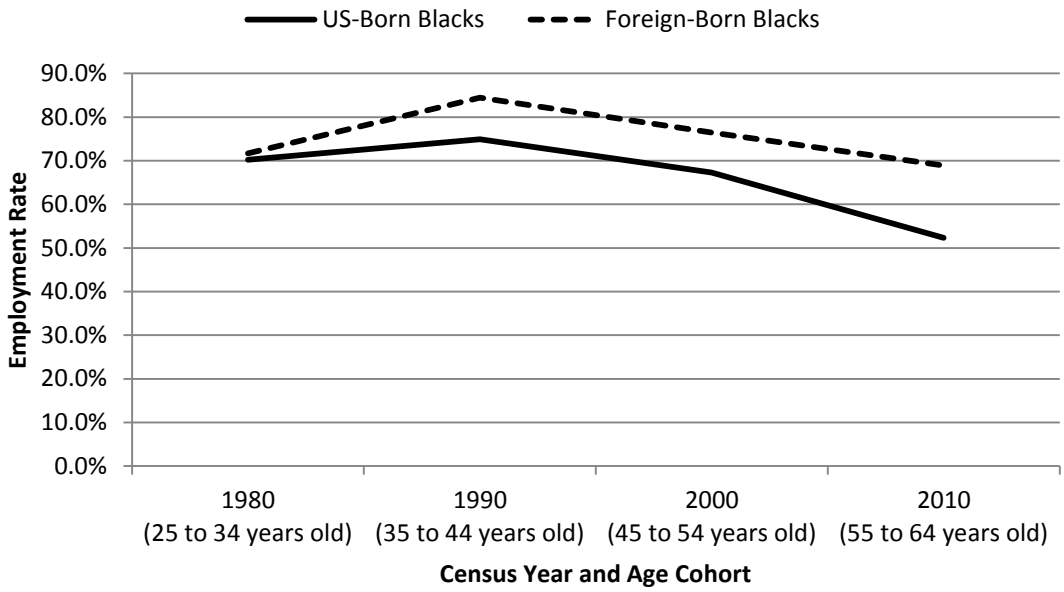


Figure 17. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 1990-2010

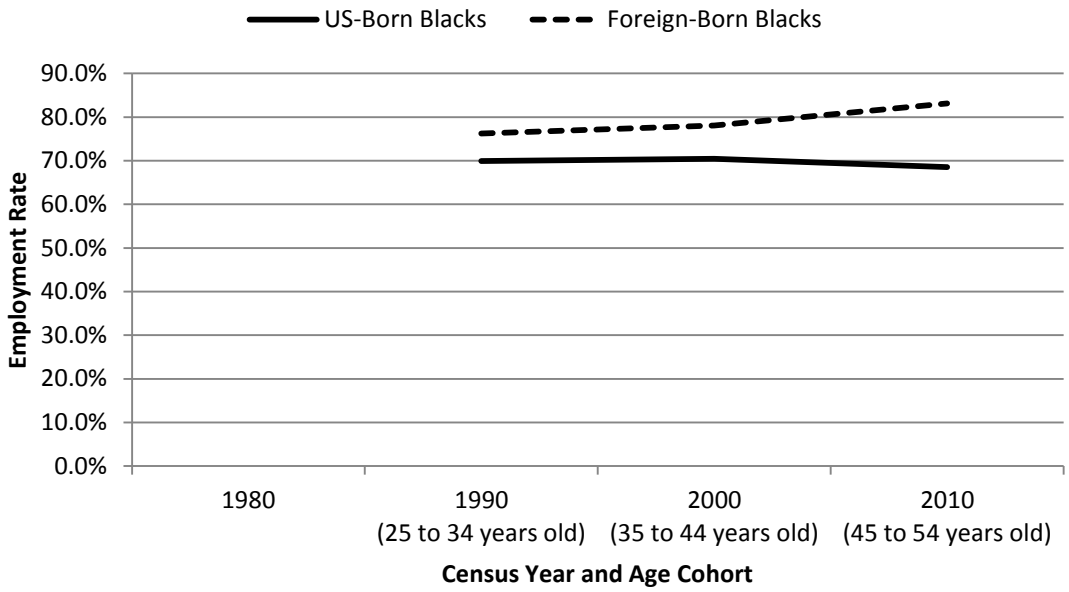


Figure 18. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Nativity, 2000-2010

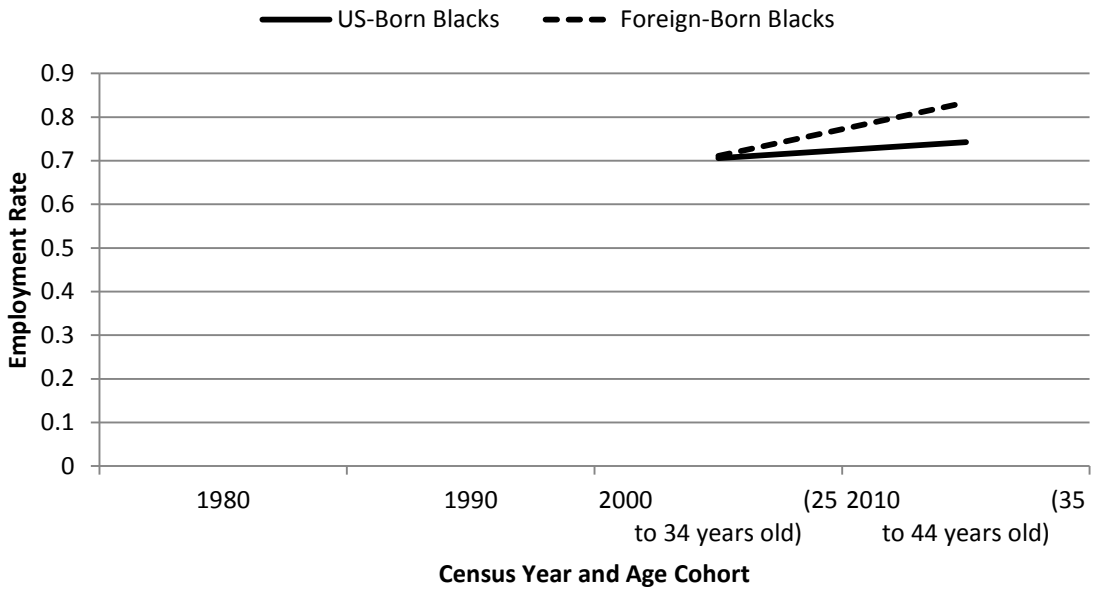


Figure 19. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

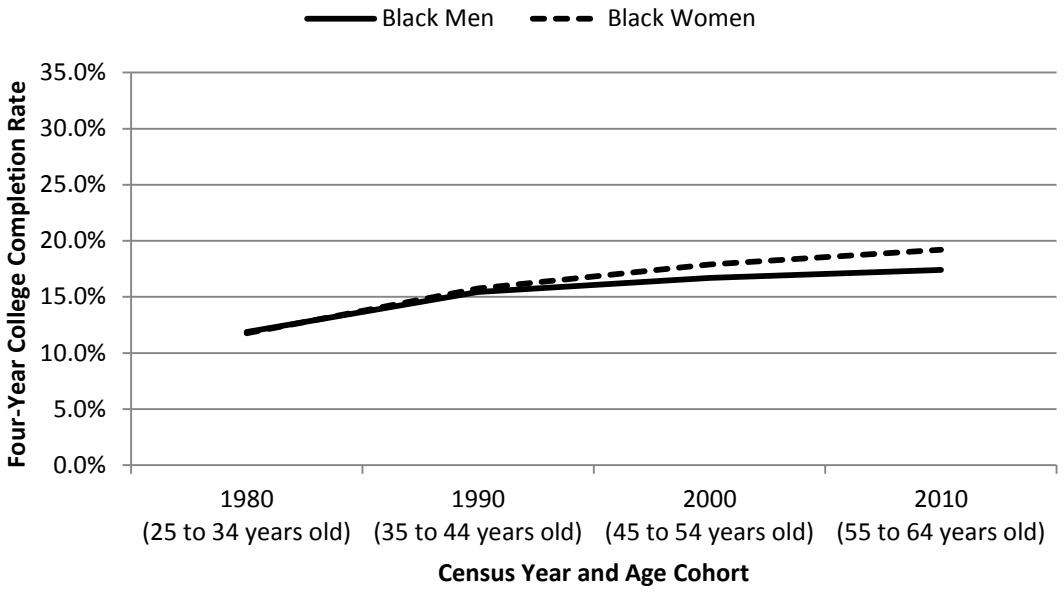


Figure 20. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

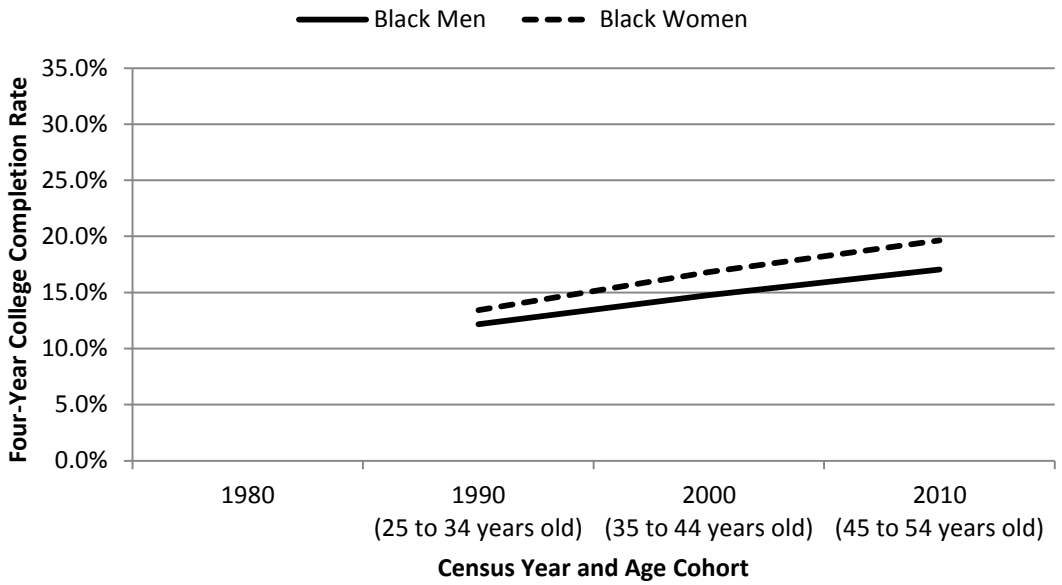


Figure 21. Four-Year College Completion Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010

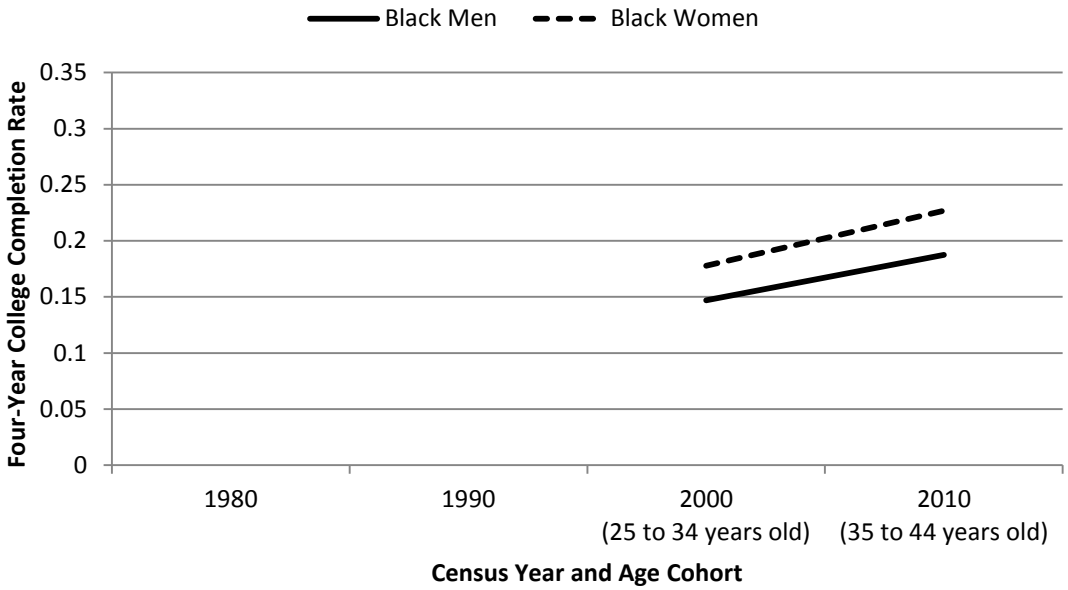


Figure 22. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

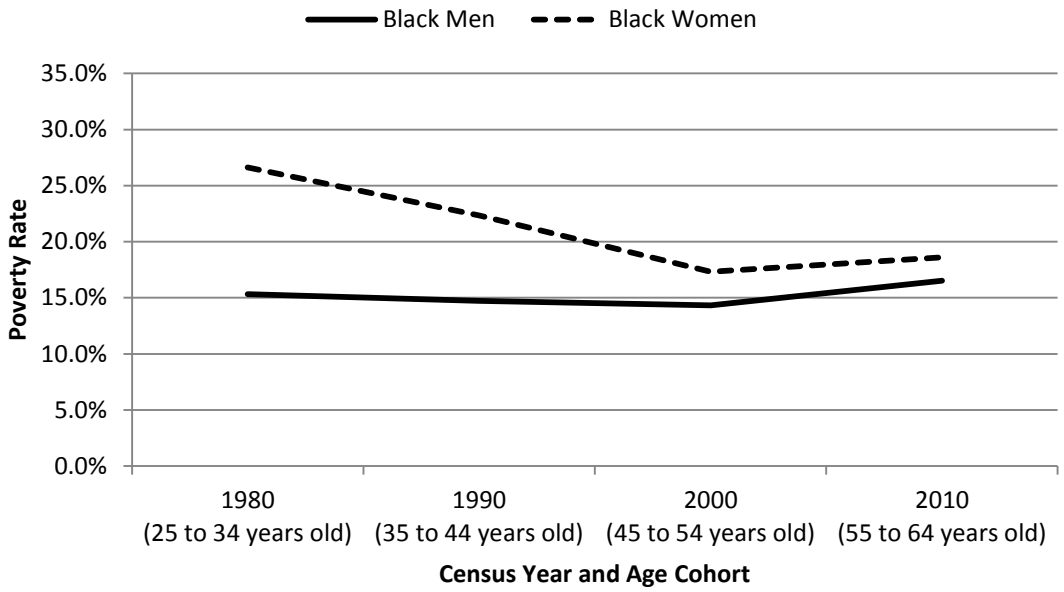


Figure 23. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

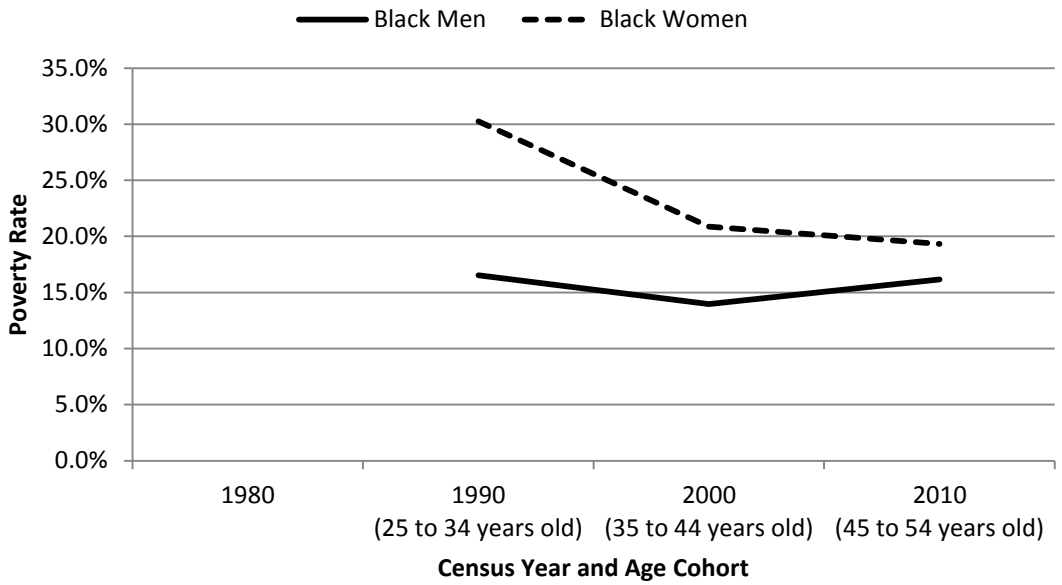


Figure 24. Poverty Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010

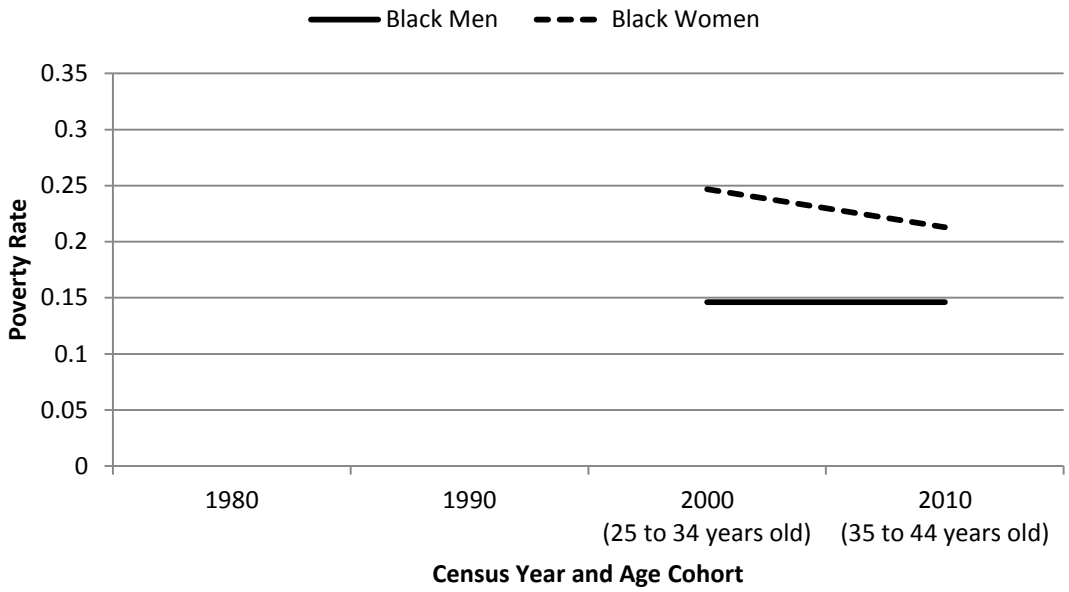


Figure 25. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

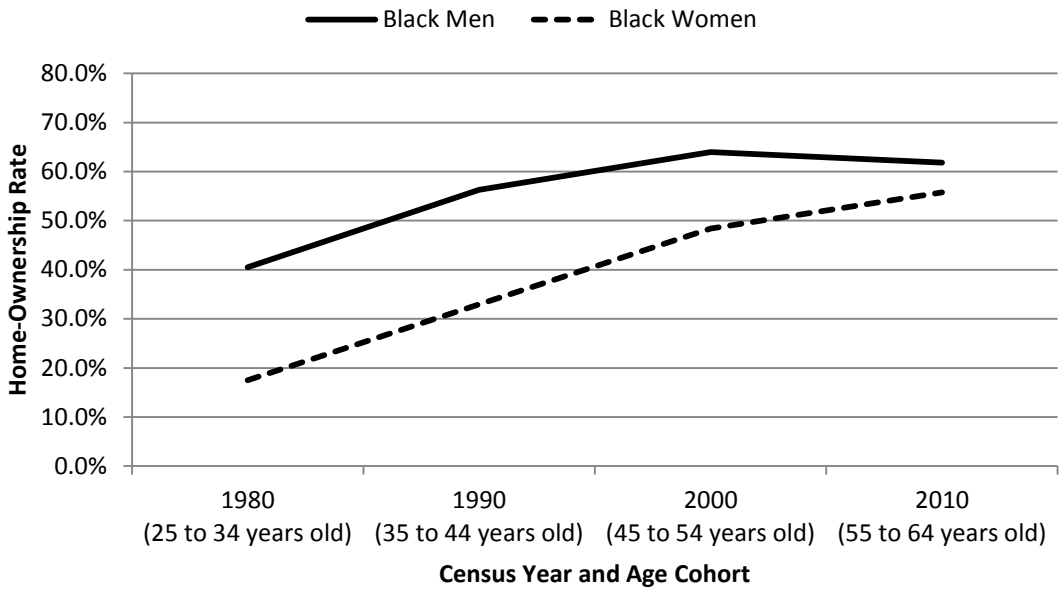


Figure 26. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

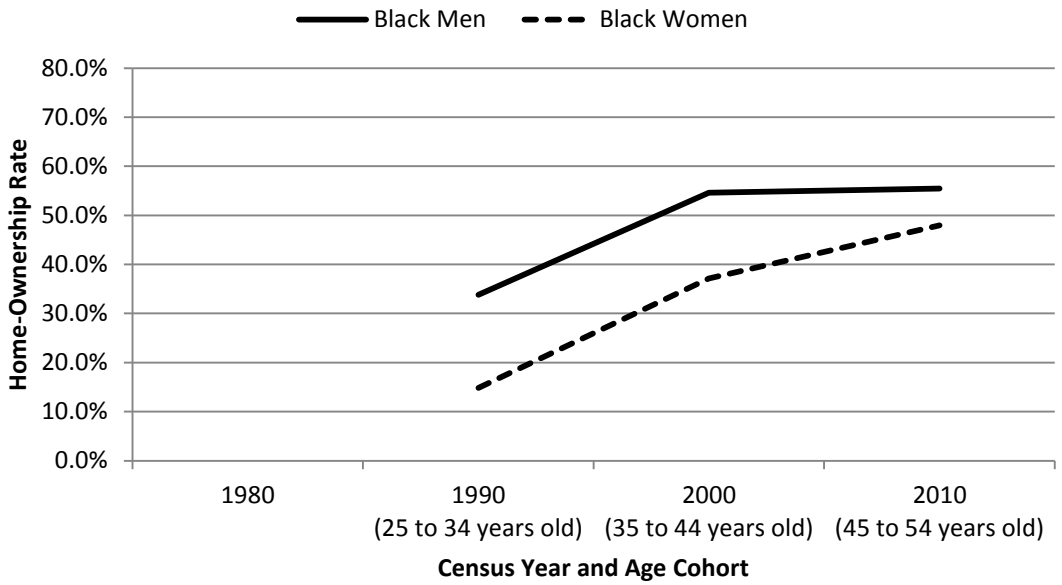


Figure 27. Home-Ownership Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010

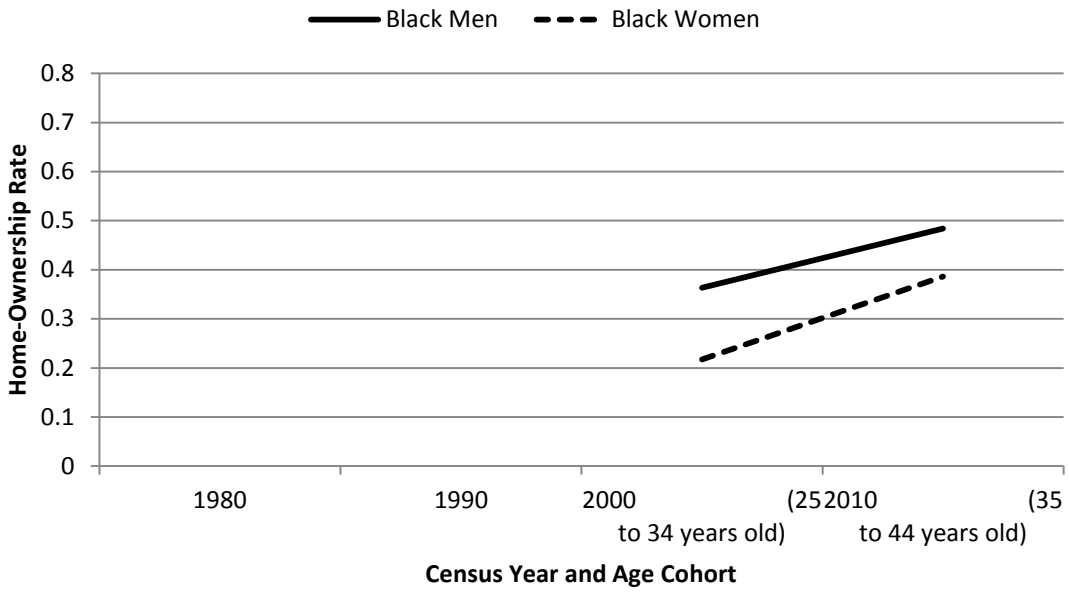


Figure 28. Not in Labor Force Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

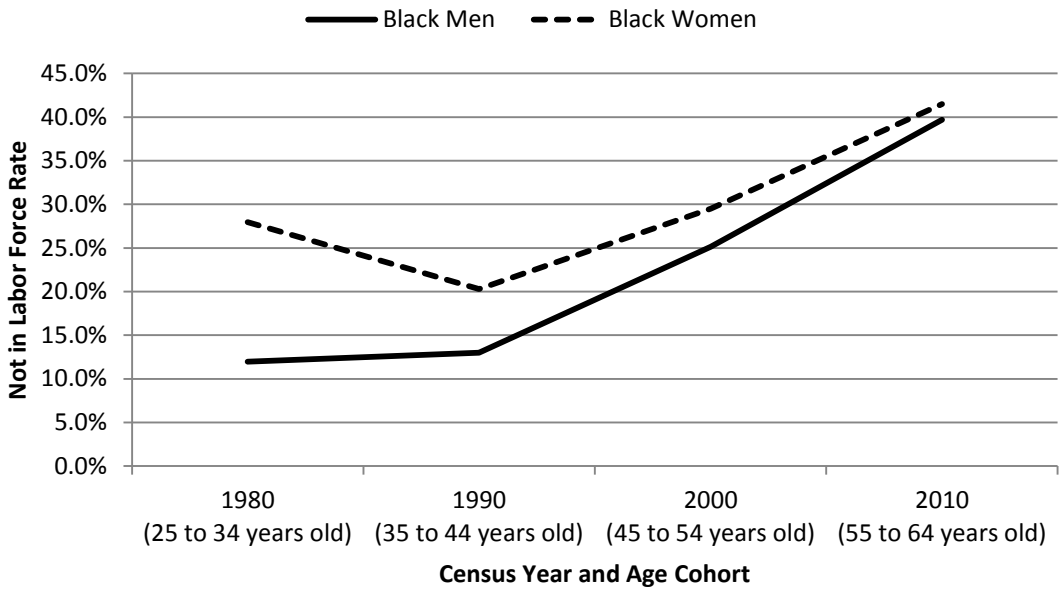


Figure 29. Not in Labor Force Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

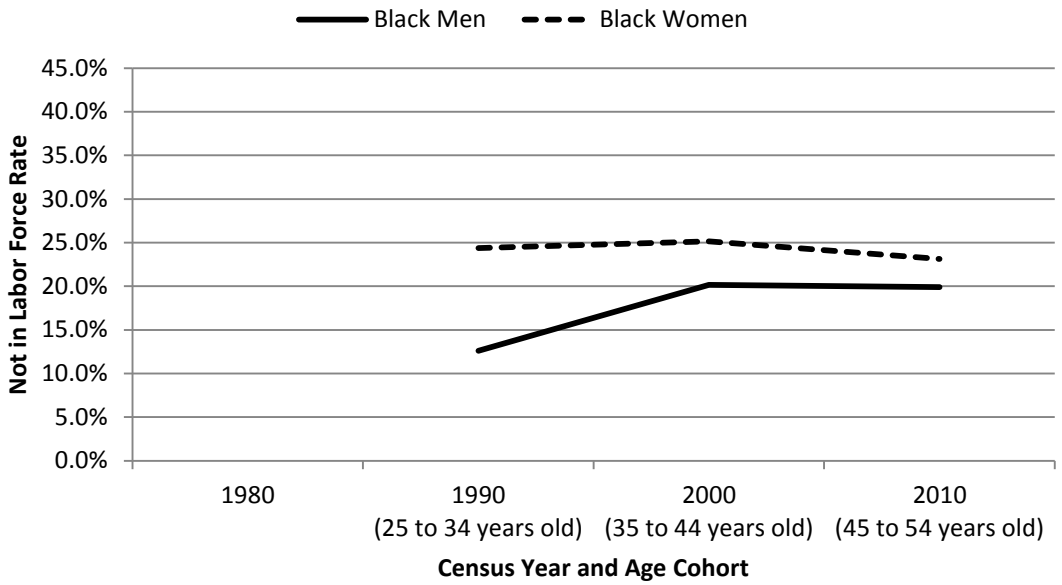


Figure 30. Not in Labor Force Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010

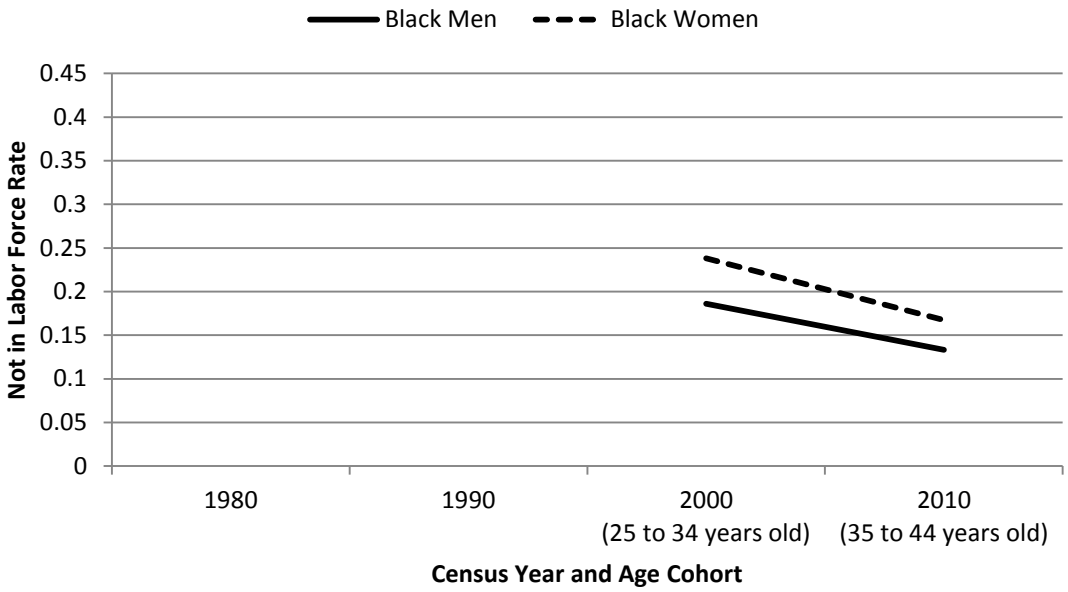


Figure 31. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

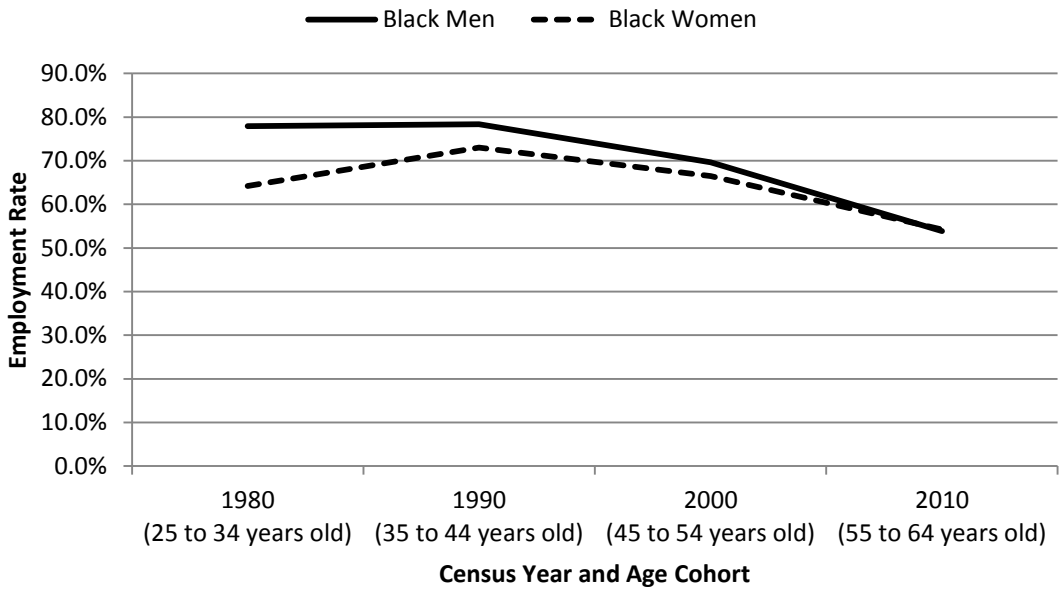


Figure 32. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

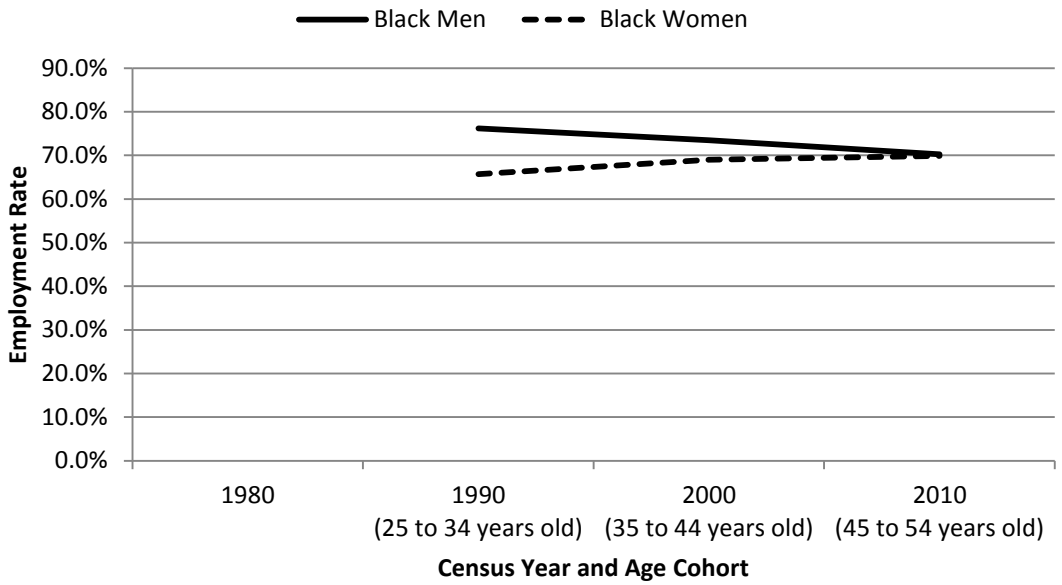


Figure 33. Employment Rate of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010

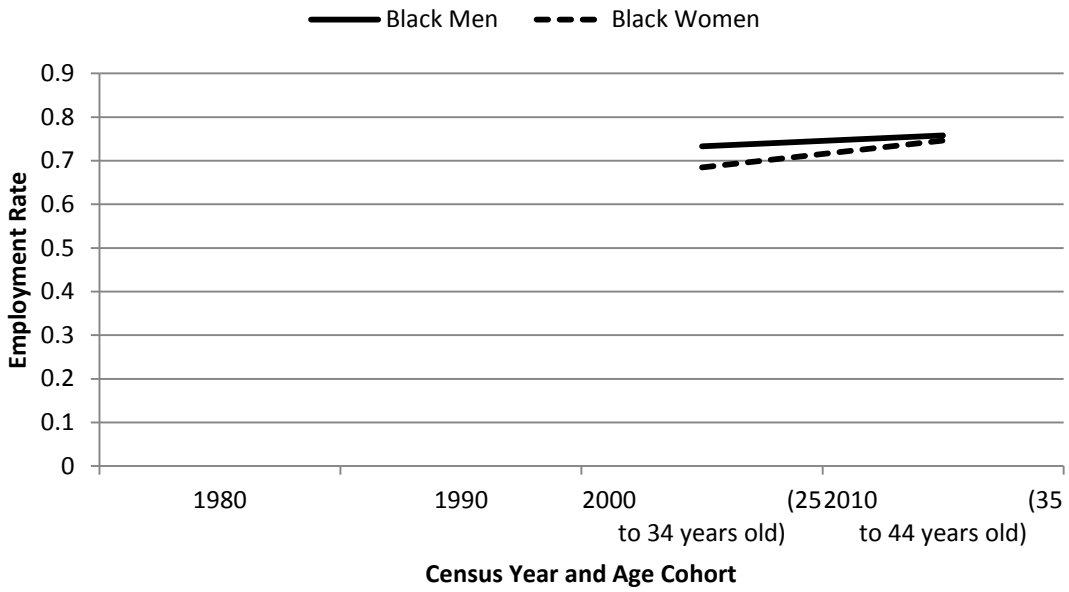


Figure 34. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1980-2010

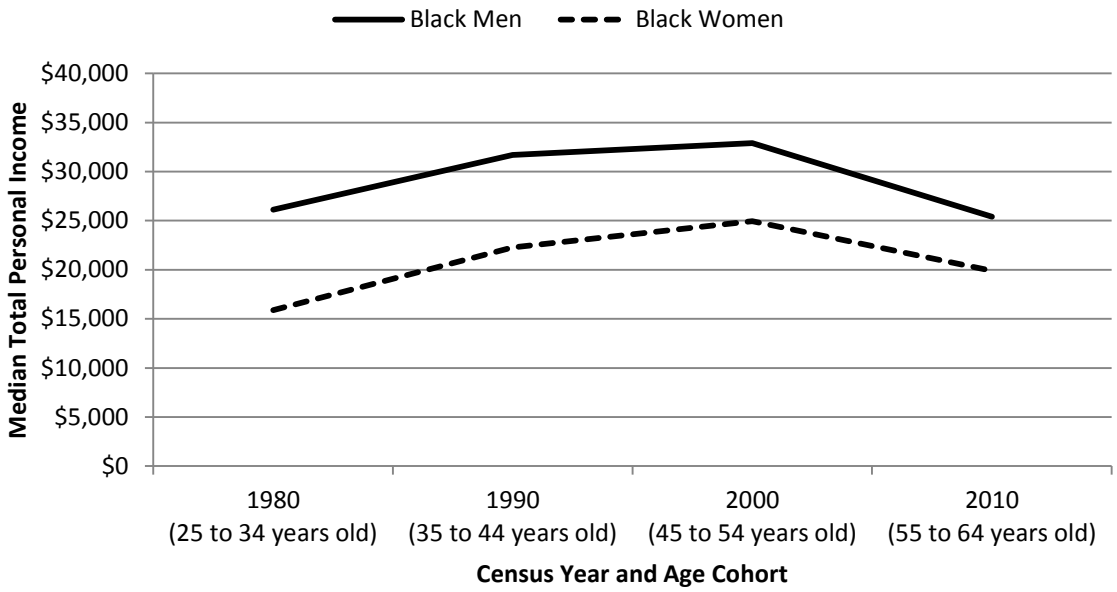


Figure 35. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 1990-2010

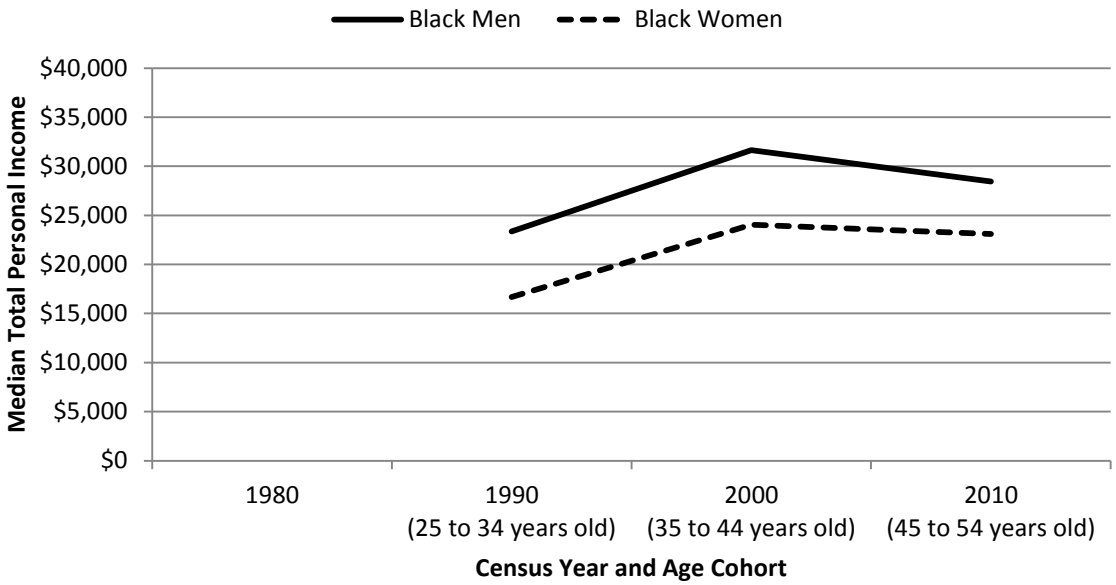
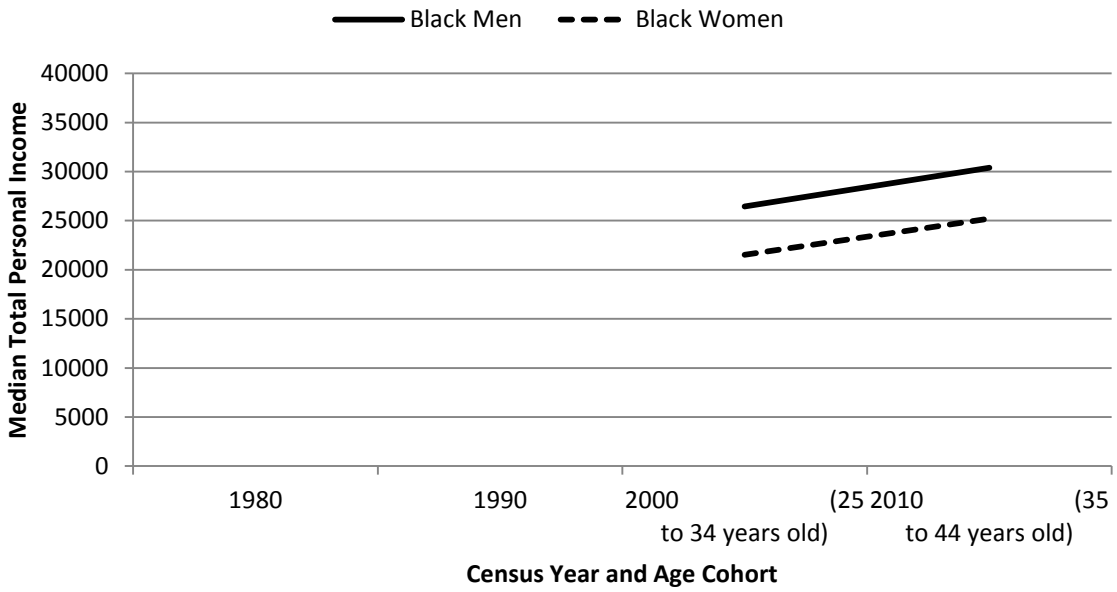


Figure 36. Median Total Personal Income of Black Age Cohorts by Gender, 2000-2010



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