

Racial disparities persist in higher-paying jobs

Blacks, Hispanics lag behind whites in largest rates in about a decade

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WASHINGTON - Blacks and Hispanics lag behind whites for higher-paying jobs at the largest rates in about a decade as employment opportunities dwindled during the nation's economic woes and housing slump.

Census data released Monday show an increasingly educated U.S. work force whose earnings didn't always seem to match up with its potential.

"The lesson of most economic downturns is minorities are the last hired, first fired. They lose jobs more quickly, and they will be the last to recover," said Roderick Harrison, a demographer at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank that studies minority issues.

Among those 25 and older last year, 86.6 percent had graduated from high school, up from 85.7 percent the previous year. It was the biggest increase since 1992, with record percentages of people earning diplomas across all racial and Hispanic categories.

The share of people with at least a bachelor's degree from college also increased, from 28.7 percent to 29.4 percent, continuing a decades-long rise.

Blacks overall slightly narrowed the gap in 2007 with whites in average salary, but the pay disparity widened for blacks with college degrees. Blacks who had a four-year bachelor's degree earned \$46,502, or about 78 percent of the salary for comparably educated whites.

It was the biggest disparity between professional blacks and whites since the 77 percent rate in 2001, when the U.S. fell into a recession due to the collapse of the tech bubble and the Sept. 11 terror attacks. College-educated blacks had previously earned as much as 83 percent of the average salary of whites in 2005.

Hispanics saw similar trends.

Those with high school diplomas earned about 83 cents for whites' every dollar, largely unchanged from a decade ago. But Hispanics with bachelor's degrees had an average salary of \$44,696, amounting to roughly 75 cents for every dollar made by whites — the lowest ratio in more than a decade — after hitting a peak of 87 cents to every dollar in 2000.

The numbers highlight some of the barriers for minorities, said Mark Mather, a demographer for the Population Reference Bureau. He said the pay disparities could widen further since blacks and Hispanics tend to be relative latecomers to the professional world and thus more vulnerable to layoffs in the current recession.

In 2008, a record number of workers filed federal job discrimination complaints, with allegations of race discrimination making up the greatest portion at more than one-third of the 95,000 total claims.

"It's clear education alone is not the full reason for the pay gaps," said Sarah Crissey, a housing and economic statistician for the Census Bureau.

Other findings:

- For the second year in a row, the number of women with bachelor's degrees exceeded that of men. The share of women with the degrees — 29 percent — was also nearly equal to men. Still, women with at least a bachelor's degree earned an average salary of \$43,127, about 60 percent the amount earned by comparably educated men.
- About 92 percent of white adults had at least a high school diploma, compared with 89 percent for Asians, 83 percent for blacks and 62 percent for Hispanics.
- Black adults in recent years narrowed the gap with white adults in earning high school diplomas, but the gap has generally widened for college degrees. About 33 percent of white adults had at least a bachelor's degree in 2008, compared with 20 percent for blacks and 13 percent for Hispanics.
- More than half, or 53 percent, of Asian adults had at least a bachelor's degree.
- Workers with a high-school degree earned an average of \$31,286 in 2007, while those with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$57,181.
- Foreign-born U.S. residents, which include illegal immigrants, were three times more likely than native-born to lack a high school diploma.

The census data came from the Current Population Survey as of April 2008. The figures for "white" refer to those who are not of Hispanic ethnicity. Since the government considers "Hispanic" an ethnicity and not a race, people of Hispanic descent can be of any race.

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