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BLACKS IN THE ECONOMY

HOW THEY VIEW THE BLACKS' CONDITION

Blacks

From page one

in 1986 took place in four police districts. The population in those four districts is predominantly black; the four districts include only 40 percent of the city's population. More than 80 percent of the victims and nearly 80 percent of the suspects were black.

The projected lack of higher education among blacks seems to attract the most concern among experts interviewed.

William J. Harrison, associate dean of instruction at Forest Park Community College, said: "You have two problems. You have declining black enrollment and a worsening attitude toward opportunities for black people in our society. The atmosphere is poison."

Harrison and other educators say blacks have been squeezed out of college by shifting federal policies that have replaced college grants with loans.

The American Council on Education, an advocacy and research group for U.S. colleges and universities, reported last year:

"The continued decline of blacks... in proportional representation in collegiate student bodies is a crisis of substantial dimensions for American society."

The report predicted that continued division along racial, ethnic and class lines would cause minority groups to give up their hope to improve their positions in society.

Education Council reports show that black enrollment in colleges is down despite higher numbers of blacks graduating from high school.

For example:
■ In 1976, 2,239,000 black seniors — or 67.5 percent — graduated from high school. Nine years later, 2,810,000 black seniors — or 75.6 percent — graduated from high school.

■ In 1976, 749,000 of the black graduates — or 33.5 percent — entered college. In 1985, only 734,000 — or 26.1 percent — of the graduates entered college.

From 1980 to 1984, black college enrollment declined 3.3 percent overall, and blacks were the only racial category to show a decline, according to the American Council on Education. Total enrollment was up 2 percent in the period.

Declines were recorded in Missouri and Illinois as well.

Blacks also were the only racial group to register a decline in college faculty positions from 1977 to 1985, the Education Council said. Black faculty members dropped by 4.3 percent, to 18,827 from 19,674.

Blacks already are losing some hard-fought places in the middle class, as America's economy shifts to service and technical jobs from labor-intensive manufacturing jobs.

Some blacks who in past years earned high wages in factories have been displaced by automation or imports and now are working in service jobs for a fraction of their previous pay — if they have jobs at all.

For many blacks, the opportunity to translate plain old hard work into a solid income seems to be fading away forever.

Paul Miller, president of P.L. Miller & Associates and Beverage Concepts Inc., said, "Twenty-five or 30 years ago you had blacks who migrated to St. Louis to fill entry-level jobs at manufacturing plants that produced not only a livable wage, but



"When people feel they have nothing to lose and something to gain, they're going to take the chance [on crime]."

MARTIN M. "MICKEY" ROSEN, assistant director of the Human Development Corp. in St. Louis



"What the white community has to understand is sooner or later they're going to pay for it one way or another: In higher crime, in higher alcoholism, in higher drug abuse, in greater fragmentation of the family."

THE REV. LARRY RICE, New Life Evangelistic Center



"This is a very religious town. In many storefront churches, the members are not registered to vote. You have a large number of people who... leave everything up to God."

ALICE WINDOM, coordinator of program to prepare inner-city students to attend UMSL



"St. Louis suffers from having been a middle city in everything. It's in the middle of the country. It was in a Border State in the Civil War. It's been in the middle of everything and not on either side of anything."

ROBERT L. ABERNATHY, minority-jobs officer for General Dynamics Corp.



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FRANKIE M. FREEMAN, St. Louis lawyer; member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from 1964 to 1980

actually allowed these people to move into the middle class.

"Those kinds of opportunities don't exist any more," said Miller. "Jobs have shifted away from these urban areas."

"By 2000, if we have not done some preparation to see that we have a better-educated work force, then we're not going to have the people that can do the jobs."

Russell Signorino, the labor market analyst with the Missouri Division of Employment Security here, says high unemployment among blacks is so common that it no longer seems shocking.

At points in this decade, unemployment in the black labor force in St. Louis has soared higher than 25 percent, Signorino says.

The agency estimates that 18.7 percent of black workers in the St. Louis area lacked jobs last year. The overall unemployment rate in the area was 7 percent; the rate for whites alone was 4.8 percent.

The figures do not include the "discouraged workers" who are chronically unemployed and in some cases have quit looking for work.

Cutbacks in industries that have blacks in low-seniority positions and disparities in education help explain the differences in white and black unemployment rates, Signorino says.

His agency estimates that more than 30 percent of those St. Louis blacks 16 to 19 years old who want to work cannot find jobs. Finding jobs for teens is crucial, Signorino said.

"This is the time when they learn what it is to work," he said.

Howard B. Denson, publisher of the Black Pages telephone directory here, said, "We've learned to accept what I (once) would have regarded as... almost recession levels of unemployment as the norm."

Others describe the situation less delicately.

"Racism is quite alive and well in St. Louis," said Alice Windom, the coordinator of a program to prepare inner-city high school students to attend the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

"How can you tell? Because of the deplorable condition of black people in this town."

Speaking of the city of St. Louis, she said: "While black people are 50 percent of this town, we don't begin to have 50 percent of the wealth or the jobs."

"It's easy to get loans for cars, but hard to get loans to fix up your house," she said. "Blacks own few institutions except for churches."

Windom and some other blacks here say little change seems to happen — or even be discussed.

Denson speaks of a "lower level of awareness" among St. Louis blacks and says that a friend was only half-joking when he observed: "It's almost as if St. Louis never went through the 1960s."

Robert L. Abernathy, an officer for General Dynamics Corp.'s minority jobs program, rates black consciousness among blacks here as "a high mediocre."

He said: "St. Louis suffers from having been a middle city in everything. It's in the middle of the country. It was in a Border State in the Civil War."

"It's been in the middle of everything and not on either side of anything. I think that accounts for the lack of black cohesiveness or black consciousness."

Windom said: "People who are dynamic learn early they really shouldn't stay in St. Louis. If you go to other cities you will find St. Louisians who have left and who are doing things."

BLACKS IN THE ECONOMY

A six-part Post-Dispatch series

Sunday: Black economic advancement stalls; gap between blacks and whites widens.

Monday: Many area blacks, caught in a cycle of poverty, cannot escape the "underclass."

Tuesday: Black working class fights for necessities; youths need higher education.

Wednesday: Few in number, members of the black middle class have found success.

Thursday: Despite high aspirations, few blacks hold top-level jobs at large companies.

Friday: Successful black entrepreneurs here attract both white and black customers.

She added, "This is a very religious town. In many storefront churches, the members are not registered to vote. You have a large number of people who... leave everything up to God."

Denson says blacks' troubles are largely a reflection of "low self-esteem," a result of racism.

"If you look at the black experience in this country, the unique form of slavery, the long, long transition from slavery to the point where a black person, especially a black man, could have any form of dignity whatsoever, it's clear that in terms of self-esteem, being black and being an American has been an extremely devastating experience," he said.

Robert C. Watson, executive director of the Urban League's Vaughn Cultural Center and a former instructor at Washington University, says institutional racism predates the founding of the United States and has directed — and inhibited — the progress of blacks.

"The Constitution made blacks three-fifths of a human being without rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Watson said.

"Educational institutions and economic institutions were set up to discriminate on the basis of race and sex."

Frankie M. Freeman, a lawyer here who was a member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from 1964 to 1980, says the community has failed to deal with the problems of poor blacks.

Freeman says that earnings of the average black family are less than 60 percent of the earnings of the average white family.

"I don't know how you can say anything other than racism is responsible for the disparity between black and white family incomes," she said.

"When I go to the National supermarket or Schnucks or Dierbergs, I don't pay 58 percent or 59 percent of what a white person pays; I pay what everybody else pays."

"You're talking a 40 percent difference," she said. "You take it as an statistic; you don't deal with it in real terms."

Jack Kirkland, an associate professor of sociology at Washington University, said, "Black people have worked hard, have undergone a great deal of social stress, and they have accepted reluctantly the station of life which is forced on us as a result of an institutionalized racist system."

Kirkland is black.

He said, "I don't think that there's a great deal for a working-class black to look forward to."

Abernathy, of General Dynamics, said: "We know what the work force will contain in the year 2000. We know who they are, what they will look like and what potentially they'll be unless something changes, and that picture is bleak."

"It's bleak because the new jobs that will be created over the next 10 years will require greater entry-level skills" in reading and math, he said.

"We know that most minorities entering the work force will come from inner cities," Abernathy said. "We know that 50 percent of inner-city high school students will drop out before finishing high school at a time when the jobs that are being created will be demanding greater skills to enter."

"When you start to look at a picture like that, if we don't do something to impact it, we're going to create an underclass that doesn't have the basic skills to enter the work force, while we go begging for people to fill our jobs."

The Rev. Larry Rice, the head of the New Life Evangelistic Center, 1411 Locust Street, says Americans must brace themselves if the economic courses of whites and blacks continue to diverge.

"What the white community has to understand," Rice said, "is sooner or later they're going to pay for it one way or another: In higher crime, in higher alcoholism, in higher drug abuse, in greater fragmentation of the family."