Evidence from the data tape for the 1985 Directory of the American Economic Association indicates that blacks and women remain underrepresented compared to their numbers in the general population. Although we present some limited evidence of increased representation of these minorities, the finding of underrepresentation is robust when we look at other measures of career status such as rank achieved or status of institution of employment. A fuller understanding of the determinants of minority participation within the economics profession will require that the data presented here be combined with data from other sources on productivity, salaries, and labor market alternatives.

Women and blacks historically have been underrepresented in the economics profession relative to their numbers in the general population. Why this has been so, is an important question. But it is not the question we address here. Instead, we explore a large and relatively recent source of information on economists in order to learn whether current trends continue past experience or deviate from it.

The evidence we present should be of interest to those who care about the career opportunities and career choices of minorities (which in economics includes women, ethnic minorities, and the foreign born) as well as those who are concerned with historical changes in the demographic and institutional structure of the economics profession. The evidence may also be of interest to those with particular policy objectives, e.g., that the percentage of minorities in prestigious occupations should be roughly the same as that in the population at large.

Earnings regressions have frequently been estimated for academics,
often controlling for race and sex as a way to test for labor market discrimination. A few papers have focused on the salaries of economists. In addition, the annual reports in the American Economic Review (A.E.R.) of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession provide some useful data on hiring and promotion of women.

Although a few papers have looked at nonsalary aspects of the labor market experience of women and blacks, almost no work has been published on the status of those of foreign birth or citizenship. The one exception is Grubel and Scott.

THE DATA

The data, available on two magnetic tapes from the A.E.A., consists of information published in 1981 and 1985 as the December issues of the A.E.R. under the title “Biographical Listing of Members of the A.E.A.” In what follows, I generally refer to an edition of the Biographical Listing of Members as a Directory. Most of the analyses are performed using the 1985 Directory. The exception occurs when we compare the black economists listed in the 1981 A.E.A. Directory with the black economists listed in the Directory of Black Economists for 1979 (the most recent edition available as of this writing). The sources of the data used by Western Publishing Co. to construct the 1985 Directory for the A.E.A. consisted of a current mailing list of members, a survey mailed to current and lapsed members, and entries from the previous (1981) Directory.

In addition to the usual biographical and career information, the data tape includes answers to questions on sex, race, country of citizenship and country of birth. Although such questions were asked on the questionnaire and the answers included on the tape, the answers were not published in either the individual biographical listings or in any separate tabulations of which I am aware. The survey questionnaire identifies the questions on sex, race, etc. as “optional statistical data” and informs the respondent that:

With increasing frequency, the Association is asked about the numbers of economists who are members of various groups. Please help by answering the following questions. YOUR RESPONSE WILL NOT APPEAR IN THE SURVEY. (the capitalization is on the questionnaire)

One potential problem with using the data on minority membership is