I. INTRODUCTION

The primary focus in the literature on the impact of race in the U.S. labor market has been the changing relative status of black workers over time. As measured by wages, occupational attainment, and occupational segregation, if not unemployment rates, blacks in the U.S. made economic progress relative to whites during the 1960s and 1970s, but have lost ground since (Bound and Dresser, 1999; Bound and Holzer, 1996; Gittleman and Howell, 1995; Badgett and Williams, 1994; Blau and Berger, 1992; Bound and Freeman, 1992; Cunningham and Zalokar, 1992; Shulman, 1991; Jaynes and Williams, 1989).

Investigations of this "erosion"—concentrated almost exclusively on men—identify two broad sources of decline in the 1980s and early 1990s: structural economic change and the weakened political position of the civil rights and labor movements. African Americans are over-represented in those geographical, industrial, and educational labor markets in which labor demand is falling due to the structural forces of globalization and automation. The diminished power of progressive political movements has been reflected in high unemployment rates, the sliding value of the minimum wage, a continuing fall in union density, enfeebled anti-discrimination efforts, and a shrinking public sector.

Scholarship on the economic situation of black women is thin. However, the researchers who have examined the situation of black women specifically find that racial wage and employment gaps are also widening among women (Bound and Dresser, 1999; Anderson and Shapiro, 1996; McCrane and Leete, 1994; Badgett and Williams, 1994). Black women appear to have been affected by many of the same forces hindering black
men, while also confronting increased competition from white women as white women's labor force participation rates have risen. Young white women are accruing both labor market experience and education at a faster rate than are young black women, and young white women are earning higher returns to education than are young black women (Bound and Dresser; 1999; McCrate and Leete, 1994). For example, the share of young black women with college educations employed in clerical positions is rising quickly while young, college educated white women are making greater inroads into managerial and professional occupations (Bound and Dresser, 1999).

This article explores the basis of African Americans' relative labor market success from another perspective, asking the question "where are black women and men doing relatively well, and why?" rather than the more conventional "when have African Americans done relatively well, and why?" We investigate the current determinants of African Americans' earnings relative to comparable whites, by examining the receptivity of different metropolitan labor markets to black women and men. We conduct this investigation with the explicit recognition that race and gender are not separate, additive dynamics within labor markets, but should be studied as they operate uniquely in the experience of black women and black men separately (Reskin and Charles, 1999). Those labor markets that are most receptive to black men may not be hospitable to black women and vice versa. Using an institutional, queuing model of the labor market, the first section develops several hypotheses about the keys to black economic success in individual metropolitan areas, focusing on the industrial structure, the labor supply and success of competing groups, and the size and influence of the black and minority communities. The second section presents an empirical assessment of the strength of these hypotheses, using the Public Use Microdata One Percent Sample from the 1990 Census of Population. The final section contains our conclusions.

II. THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND HYPOTHESES

We have developed several hypotheses regarding the characteristics of metropolitan areas in which we expect that black women's and men's earnings will be relatively high. The theoretical context for these hypotheses is an institutional model of the labor market that is extremely structured, or "balkanized," to use Clark Kerr's (1954) term, into many separate labor markets defined by metropolitan area, industry, occupation and