WHITE-NONWHITE DIFFERENTIALS IN OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY AMONG MEN IN THE UNITED STATES, 1962-1972

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Abstract—Intercohort shifts between 1962 and 1972 in the occupation distributions of white and nonwhite men are analyzed and compared at ages 35-44, 45-54, and 55-64. Both white and nonwhite occupation distributions were upgraded over the decade, but among nonwhites the shifts away from the lowest-status occupations were expressed partly in increasing rates of absence from the labor force. There are indications of especially rapid shifts in the occupation distributions of nonwhite men at ages 35-44. Among whites and nonwhites intercohort shifts in the occupation distribution can be attributed primarily to changing patterns of movement from first full-time civilian jobs to current occupations, rather than to changing occupational origin distributions or patterns of movement to first jobs. The white and nonwhite occupation distributions did not show a clear pattern of convergence over the decade. They became less similar at ages 35-44 and more similar at older ages. White and nonwhite distributions were most likely to converge in those occupation groups where the share of whites was stable or declining, rather than in groups whose share of the occupation distribution was increasing. Later cohorts of nonwhites would have a much more favorable occupational distribution if they had enjoyed the mobility patterns of whites in earlier cohorts. In 1972, as in 1962, the inferior occupational chances of nonwhites are due primarily to their disadvantageous patterns of occupational mobility, rather than to impoverished social origins.

In the past decade there has probably been as much concern about trends toward "rigidification" in American society as in any earlier period. Thus efforts to obtain new readings on trends in occupational mobility are surely in order. Definitive measurements of trend over the decade await the analysis of a replication of the 1962 "Occupational Changes in a Generation" (OCG) survey (Blau and Duncan, 1967), which has been carried out in connection with the March 1973 Current Population Survey (Featherman and Hauser, 1973). However, by adaptation of a procedure used earlier by Duncan (1965), it is possible to obtain indirect evidence of changes in occupational mobility in the past decade.

In an earlier paper we looked at trends in occupational mobility for U. S. men during 1962-1970 without regard to race (Hauser and Featherman, 1973). Our major findings were that there have been net intercohort shifts toward employment as salaried professionals and managers and as skilled manual workers and away from employment as self-employed managers, as farmers, and as nonfarm laborers. Further, those net shifts were primarily a result of changes in patterns
of occupational mobility from first jobs to current occupations. That is, the shifts were not effected by changes in the occupational origins of successive cohorts or by changes in relationships between occupational origins and first jobs. This paper compares trends in the occupational mobility of white and nonwhite men in the United States from 1962 to 1972. Since nonwhites other than blacks resemble whites more closely than blacks on many social and economic characteristics, our results probably understate the more interesting black-white differences. We have replicated our analyses for the period 1962-1970 using both the white-nonwhite and black-nonblack divisions, and the two classifications give similar results.

Relatively little is known about the occupational mobility of black men at any point in time, and still less is known about trends in occupational mobility among blacks. Our knowledge about black-white differences in patterns of occupational mobility rests heavily on the results of the 1962 OCG survey, within which the numbers of blacks sampled were too small to permit reliable trend measurement by means of intercohort comparison. From his analysis of the 1962 black and white mobility matrices Duncan (1968, p. 11) concludes,

Negro men who originated at the lower levels were likely to remain there; white men were likely to move up. Negro men who originated at the higher levels were likely to move down; white men were likely to stay there. Although Negro social origins are not as favorable as those of whites, this is the lesser part of the explanation of racial differences in occupational achievement. The greater part of the explanation lies in inequalities within the process of mobility itself.

Similarly, Lieberson and Fuguitt (1967) demonstrate that the effects of social origins on racial differences in occupations would greatly decrease in a single generation and would almost disappear within about four generations if the patterns of intergenerational mobility of blacks and whites were equated.

Public programs which were supposed to improve the opportunities of blacks grew during the 1960's, and there is some evidence of improvement in the occupation distribution of employed black men during that decade. For example, a report of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1972, p. 2) shows in bright-hued charts how "Opportunities for occupational advancement of black workers have been improving. . . . Between 1960 and 1970, the number of black workers in higher-paid and middle-level occupations increased sharply. . . ." Farley and Hermanin (1972) report a gradual upgrading of the occupation distribution of both black and white men from 1960 through 1966, followed by large gains for blacks between 1966 and 1970. Thus, the share of black men who would have had to change major occupation categories to equate the black and white distributions fell from 38 percent in 1960 to 36 percent in 1966 and to 31 percent in 1970. The large remaining occupational differences between the races give little ground for complacency among those who would seek equality of achievement between the races.

In our analyses of white-nonwhite differentials in trends of occupational mobility we shall be concerned with the effects of occupational origins on the changing occupation distributions of whites and nonwhites and with the possibility of convergence between the occupational mobility patterns of whites and nonwhites. We begin with an examination by color of net occupational shifts between selected cohorts from 1962 to 1972. We then analyze these shifts for men of each color in terms of components due to changing social origins, changes in patterns of mobility from occupational origins to first jobs, and changes in mobility from first jobs to current occupa-