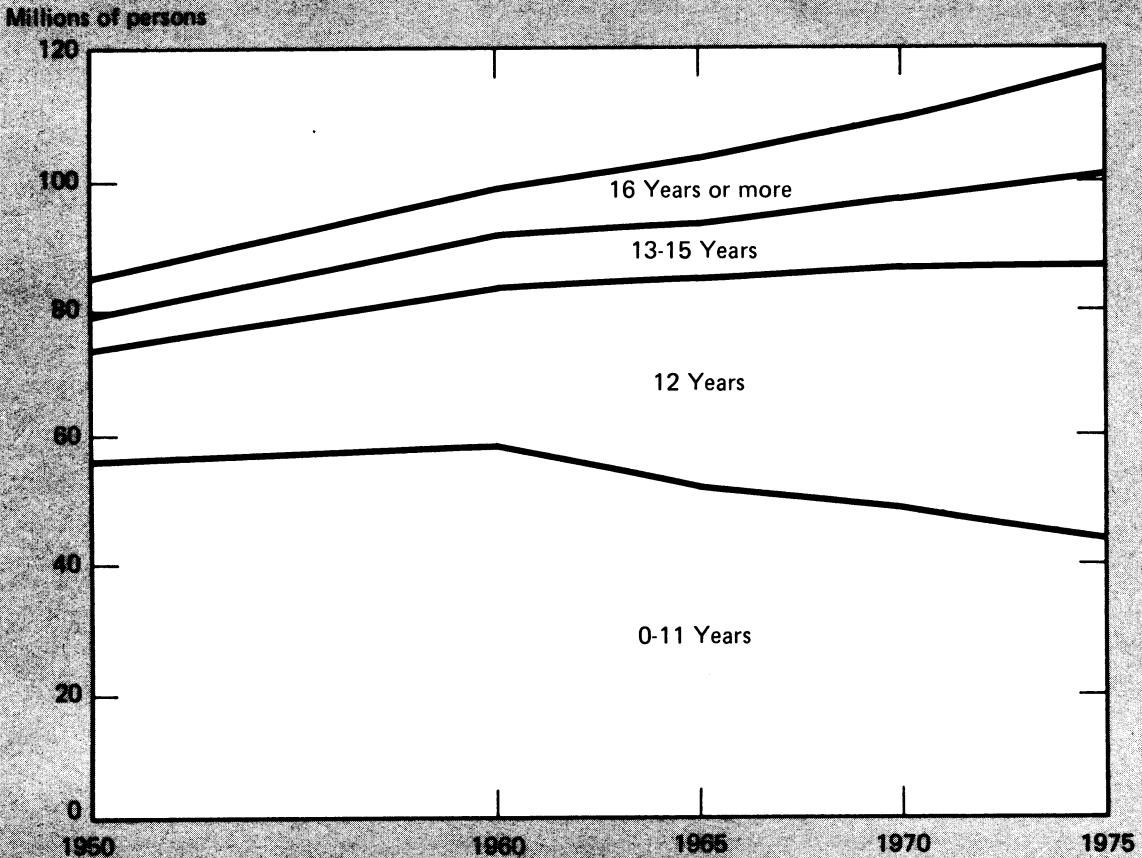


Population Characteristics

Series P-20, No. 296
Issued June 1976

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: MARCH 1975

Figure 1. Years of School Completed by Persons 25 Years Old
and Over in the United States: 1950 to 1975



U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS





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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by Linda J. Waite, Statistician, under the supervision of Larry E. Suter, Chief, Education and Social Stratification Branch. Andrea E. Word provided valuable statistical assistance in the preparation of the tables. Overall direction was provided by Charles E. Johnson, Jr., Assistant Division Chief (Demographic and Social Statistics Programs), and Paul C. Glick, Senior Demographer, Population Division.

SUGGESTED CITATION

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 295, "Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1975," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976.

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CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

Population Characteristics

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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: MARCH 1975

The proportion of each age group which had graduated from high school has risen substantially in the last 25 years. At the same time, the proportion of high school graduates which had entered college has also risen. These higher rates of college entrance combined with the increase in population size have produced larger numbers of college graduates during the past 25 years. Some of the consequences of the shifting level of schooling in the United States during the past 25 years are outlined in this report.¹

Increases in the average educational attainment of the American population influence many aspects of life. For example, spending patterns may change as the educational level of consumers rises. Moreover, the number of years of schooling completed by persons entering the labor force influences the types of jobs they seek and for which they qualify, as well as their productivity on their jobs. Also, the proportion of persons who vote is largest among those in the upper education levels. Detailed statistical tables in this report present data on years of schooling completed by the U.S. population in 1975 cross-classified by age, sex, race, Spanish origin, type of residence, and occupation.

CHANGES SINCE 1950

Increasing rates of high school graduation and college attendance since 1950 have resulted in changes in the proportional distribution of educational attainment of the population as well as the number of persons with various amounts of schooling. The following discussion focuses primarily on the changes in the number of persons old enough to have completed their formal education—those 25 years old and over. The rising educational level of the American population since 1950 was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of persons with high levels of education and a decrease in the number of persons who did not complete high school (table A).

Since 1950 the size of the adult population has increased by a third while the number of persons with less than 4 years of high school decreased by approximately a fifth and the number of high school graduates more than doubled in size. The term "high school graduate" includes persons who completed 4 years of high school as well as those who finished 1 year of college or more. During the years from 1950 to 1975 a high school diploma became a typical level of education. At mid-century, when half of all adults had completed

9 years of schooling or less, high school graduation was relatively unusual. Only one person in three had attended and completed at least 12 years of school. In the next 25 years the number of persons with a high school diploma increased by about two and one-half times so that by 1975 two out of three persons 25 years old and over held a high school diploma.

Table A. Percent Change in Years of School Completed by Persons 25 Years Old and Over by Sex and Race: 1950 to 1975

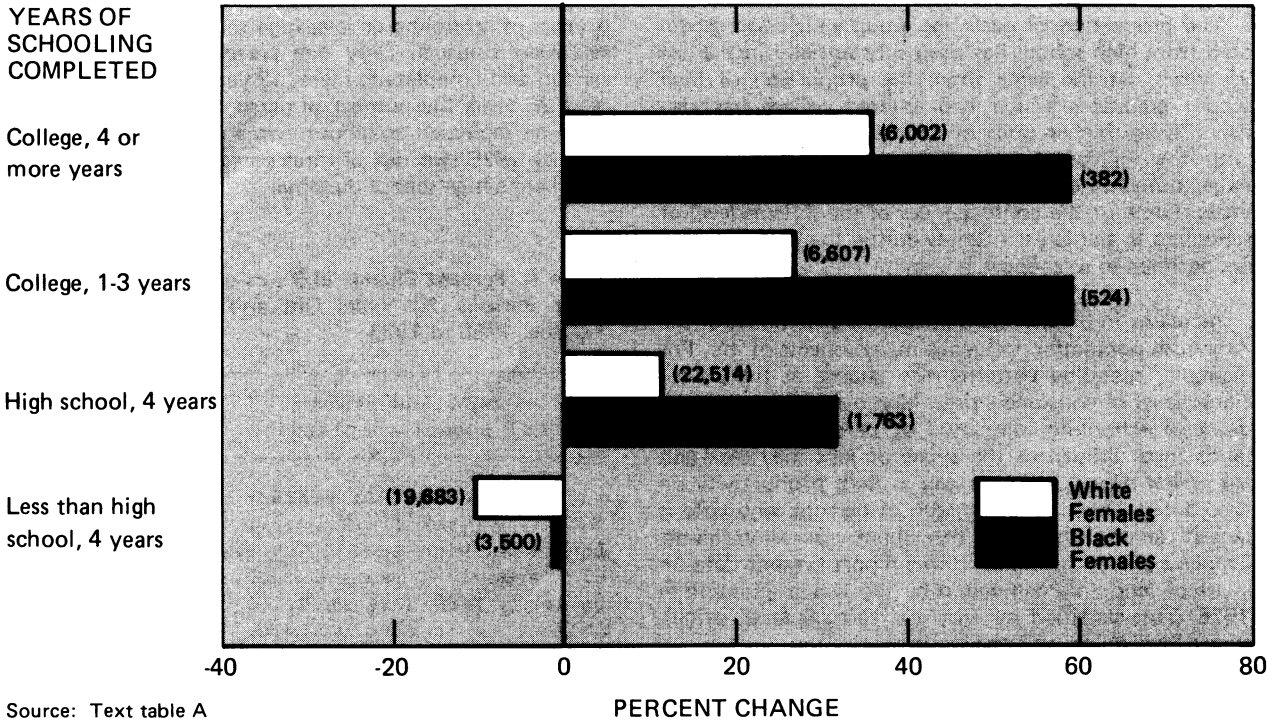
Race and years of school completed	Male	Female
All races, 25 years or over ¹	29.1	37.9
Less than high school, 4 years	-27.2	-16.5
High school, 4 years.....	136.6	143.1
College, 1 to 3 years.....	131.9	115.7
College, 4 or more years.....	221.8	190.0
White.....	27.3	34.8
Less than high school, 4 years	-30.0	-20.0
High school, 4 years.....	125.4	131.0
College, 1 to 3 years.....	140.4	104.5
College, 4 or more years.....	209.6	177.0
Black.....	32.0	51.7
Less than high school, 4 years	9.0	2.9
High school, 4 years.....	390.1	415.5
College, 1 to 3 years.....	387.8	333.1
College, 4 or more years.....	379.7	315.2

¹Includes races other than White or Black, not shown separately.

The increases in rates of high school graduation have been followed by more frequent college attendance since 1950. Although the number of persons 25 years old and over with some college training nearly tripled between 1950 and 1975, the increases were substantially greater for men than for women (table A). For males, the higher the educational level the greater rate of the increase in the size of the category since 1950. Thus, the number of male college graduates grew faster than the number of men with 1 to 3 years of college. For females, the number of high school graduates who completed no college and the number of college graduates rose more than the number of women who started college but did not finish 4 years.

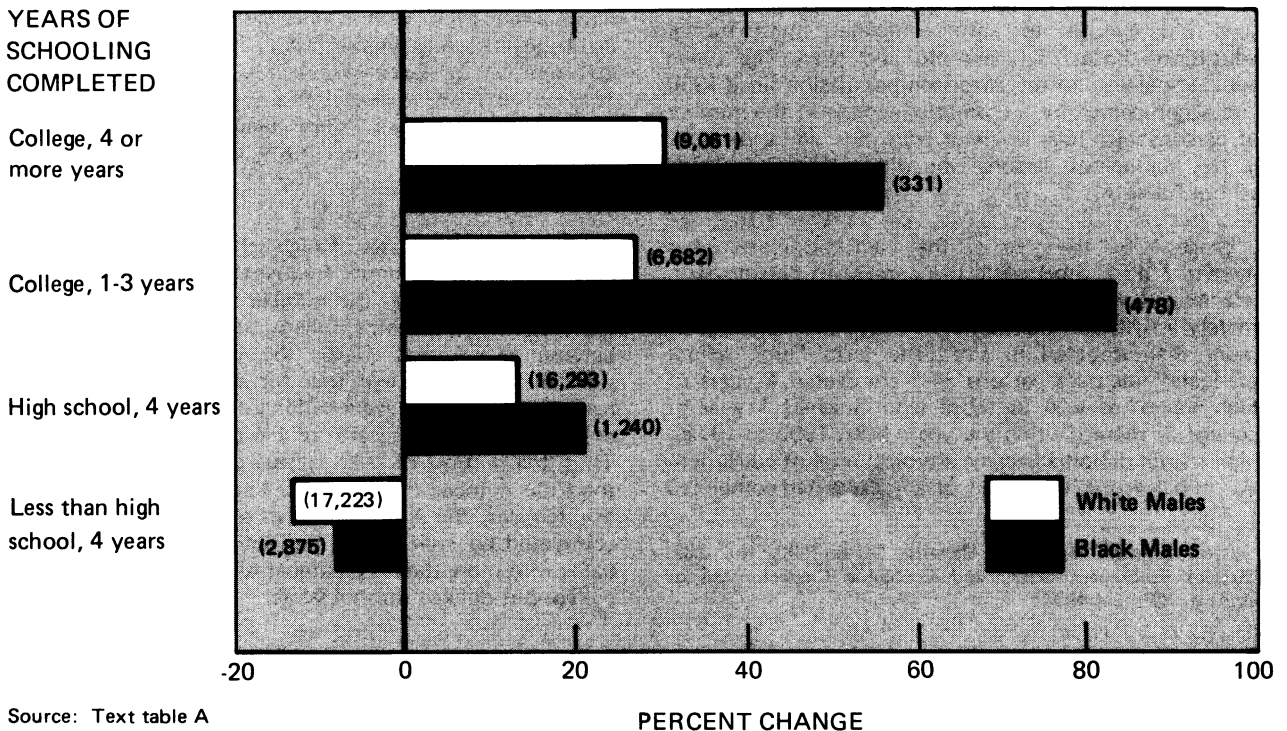
¹See **Current Population Reports**, Series P-20, No. 286, "School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1974."

Figure 2. Percent Change in Years of Schooling Completed by Females 25 Years Old and Over by Race: 1970 to 1975
(Number of persons in 1975 shown in parentheses)



Source: Text table A

Figure 3. Percent Change in Years of Schooling Completed by Males 25 Years Old and Over: 1970 to 1975
(Number of persons in 1975 shown in parentheses)



Source: Text table A

The number of persons with 4 years of high school or more has been increasing more rapidly for Blacks than for Whites (table A). There were nearly five times as many Black men in 1975 than in 1950 who had completed exactly 4 years of high school, who had completed 1 to 3 years of college, and who were college graduates. White men experienced an increase of approximately 100 to 200 percent in these categories (see table A). One reason why the percentage increase appears so great for Blacks with schooling at or above the level of high school graduation is that there was such a small number of Blacks with this much education in 1950. To illustrate, in 1950 only 2 percent of the Black population 25 years old and over had completed 4 years or more of college; in that same year, 6 percent of White adults were at least college graduates. By 1975 the proportion of Blacks with at least 4 years of college had risen by 4 percentage points compared with 8 percentage points for White. This rise, although of a moderate amount for both races, represented a four-fold increase in the number of Black college graduates 25 years old and over from 1950 to 1975 versus nearly a tripling for Whites. In 1975 as in 1950, however, college graduation was still significantly more common for White than for Black adults. The percentage point difference between the races in rates of college graduation did not narrow and in fact widened significantly over the 25-year period.

Changes From 1950 to 1970 and 1970 to 1975

Table B compares the average annual rate of growth for the number of persons 25 years old and over in each educational category for the period 1950 to 1970 with the period 1970 to 1975.² The number of persons who failed to graduate from high school declined at a faster annual rate from 1970 to 1975 than from 1950 to 1970. At the same time, growth in the number of persons who finished high school but completed no college slackened recently, dropping from an annual growth rate of 4 percent from 1950 to 1970 to less than 3 percent for the last 5 years. The population of college-trained adults, those who have completed one or more years of college, has grown much faster in the years since 1970 than it did in the preceding 20 years. For both males and females the group which has shown the highest rate of growth since 1970 comprises those with some college training. Overall, these statistics present a picture of an American population which has become increasingly better educated since mid-century and is continuing to increase its schooling in the first half of the 1970's.

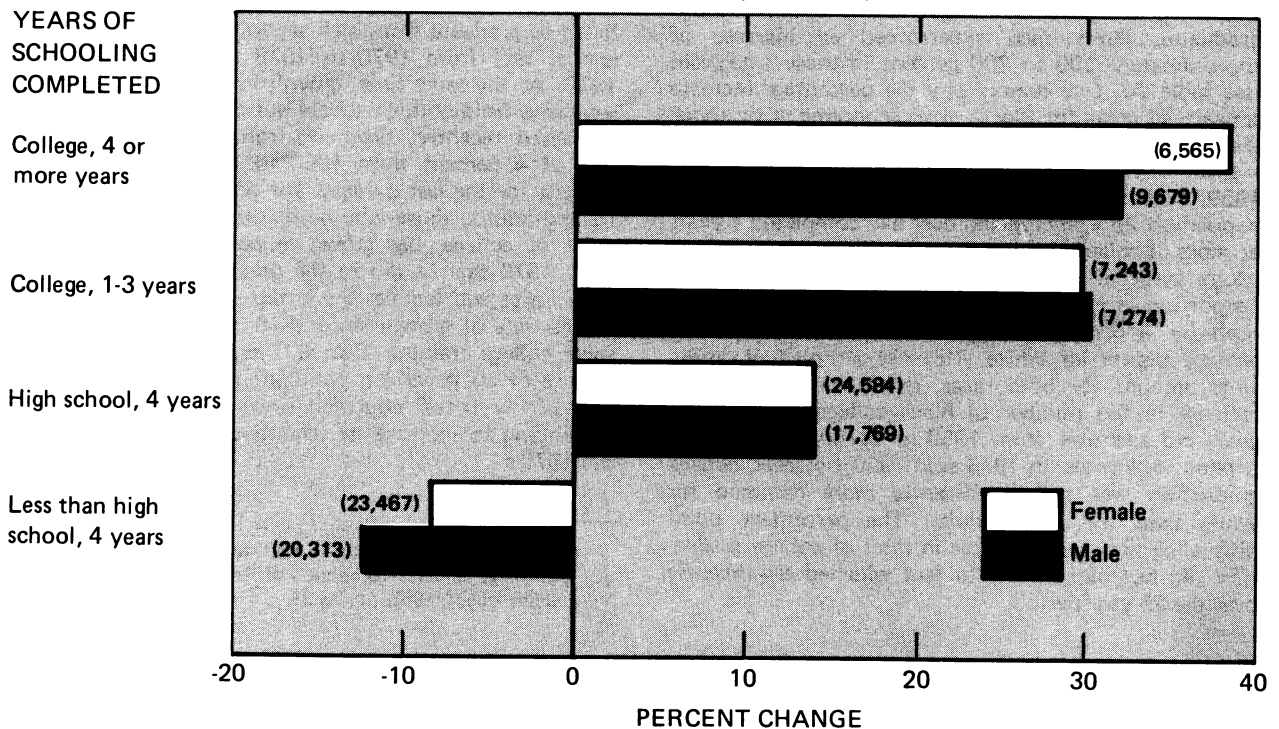
²Computed by the formula for continuous compound growth. See George W. Barclay, *Techniques of Population Analysis* (New York: John Wiley), 1958, pp. 28-33.

Table B. Average Annual Rate of Change in the Number of Persons by Years of School Completed: 1950 to 1970 and 1970 to 1975

Race and years of school completed	Male		Female	
	1970-75	1950-70	1970-75	1950-70
All races, 25 years or over ¹	1.23	.98	1.46	1.25
Less than high school, 4 years.....	-2.72	-.89	-1.75	-.45
High school, 4 years.....	2.68	3.71	2.66	3.86
College, 1 to 3 years.....	5.45	3.35	5.34	2.58
College, 4 or more years.....	5.74	4.55	6.72	3.77
White.....	1.11	.94	1.25	1.19
Less than high school, 4 years.....	-2.91	-1.04	-2.04	-.59
High school, 4 years.....	2.49	3.51	2.31	3.68
College, 1 to 3 years.....	4.91	3.24	4.94	2.40
College, 4 or more years.....	5.38	4.44	6.37	3.61
Black.....	1.29	1.08	2.44	1.49
Less than high school, 4 years.....	-1.62	-.07	-.37	.23
High school, 4 years.....	3.88	7.25	5.75	7.04
College, 1 to 3 years.....	12.86	5.02	9.69	5.14
College, 4 or more years.....	9.32	5.77	9.74	4.91

¹Includes races other than White or Black, not shown separately.

Figure 4. Percent Change in Years of Schooling Completed by Persons 25 Years Old and Over by Sex: 1970 to 1975
(Number of persons in 1975 shown in parentheses)



Occupation and Educational Attainment Since 1950

The increase in the educational level of the labor force reflects the trend in educational level of the population. This increase in the years of schooling completed by employed men occurred in all occupations, although the change was least in those occupational groups which had either the highest or the lowest educational levels in 1950.³ For women, the change in the proportion with at least 4 years of high school which occurred during the past 25 years was least in professional and clerical occupations (table C). In 1950, a majority of each of the white collar occupational groups (professions, managers, sales and clerical workers) had graduated from high school, except for women in sales occupations. None of the "blue collar" occupations in 1950 had a majority with a high school diploma. By 1975, however, a majority of the workers in all major

occupational groups had finished 4 years of high school or more, except for male farm and nonfarm laborers and female operatives.⁴

The large and rapid increase in the educational level of workers may have important consequences for future employment of persons with lower levels of education. Employees with more education are expected to be more productive and to require a shorter period of on-the-job training than those with less schooling. On the other hand, some of the workers who have spent 12 years or more in formal schooling may become dissatisfied with employment in jobs which require few skills. Already, 41 percent of male laborers and 52 percent of female laborers have completed 4 years of high school or more.

³ For discussion of trends since 1960, see William Deutermann, "Educational Attainment of Workers, March 1973," *Monthly Labor Review*, January 1974.

⁴ Although in 1975, 51.0 percent of male operatives, 52.2 percent of female nonfarm laborers, and 59.0 percent of female farm laborers and supervisors had completed at least 4 years of high school, the sampling error on these numbers is large enough that the true value may be less than 50 percent.

Table C. Percent of Employed Persons 25 to 64 Years Old Who Have Completed 4 Years of High School or More by Major Occupation Group and Sex: 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1975

Occupation group and sex	1975	1970	1960	1950	Percentage point change, 1950-75
Male, 25 to 64 years old.....	72.2	62.9	44.6	36.0	36.2
Prof., technical, and kindred workers..	97.6	96.5	91.3	87.9	9.7
Managers, and adm., except farm.....	88.1	80.0	65.5	55.6	32.5
Sales workers.....	89.4	84.0	66.8	61.3	28.1
Clerical and kindred workers.....	84.1	78.0	62.6	58.3	25.8
Craft and kindred workers.....	64.1	52.5	36.2	29.7	34.4
Operatives, including transport workers.....	51.0	41.1	25.4	21.0	30.0
Laborers, except farm.....	40.7	29.8	16.1	12.4	28.3
Service workers.....	60.4	49.2	30.5	24.4	36.0
Farmers and farm managers.....	55.6	42.5	29.8	17.4	38.2
Farm laborers and supervisors.....	29.3	19.7	11.5	11.6	17.7
Female, 25 to 64 years old.....	75.5	67.0	51.2	46.3	29.2
Prof., technical, and kindred workers..	97.5	96.5	92.4	91.4	6.1
Managers, and adm., except farm.....	83.5	78.8	62.0	53.4	30.1
Sales workers.....	78.0	67.4	48.6	46.6	31.4
Clerical and kindred workers.....	89.4	85.8	74.2	73.2	16.2
Craft and kindred workers.....	64.4	53.9	39.4	33.5	30.9
Operatives, including transport workers.....	42.6	35.2	22.5	19.1	23.5
Laborers, except farm.....	52.2	36.5	23.7	19.8	32.4
Service workers.....	52.4	42.4	25.2	21.0	31.4
Farmers and farm managers.....	(B)	(B)	32.6	20.4	(B)
Farm laborers and supervisors.....	59.0	36.0	23.5	16.8	42.2

B Base less than 75,000.

Table D. Years of School Completed by Persons 25 Years Old and Over by Race and Sex

(Numbers in thousands)

Race and sex	Total	Less than high school, 4 years	High school, 4 years	College, 1 to 3 years	College, 4 years and over	Median years completed
ALL RACES						
Male						
1975.....	55,039	20,309	17,793	7,256	9,682	12.4
1970.....	51,784	23,311	15,571	5,580	7,321	12.2
1965.....	49,242	25,611	13,334	4,370	5,923	11.7
1960.....	47,997	29,072	10,172	4,127	4,626	10.3
1950.....	42,627	27,899	7,511	2,888	3,008	9.0
Female						
1975.....	61,861	23,439	24,587	7,262	6,572	12.3
1970.....	57,527	25,638	21,563	5,584	4,743	12.1
1965.....	54,004	27,045	18,369	4,767	3,820	12.0
1960.....	51,468	29,589	14,267	4,620	2,991	10.9
1950.....	44,857	28,084	10,114	3,358	2,264	9.6
WHITE						
Male						
1975.....	49,260	17,210	16,320	6,660	9,070	12.5
1970.....	46,606	19,963	14,410	5,259	6,972	12.2
1965.....	44,393	22,109	12,536	4,124	5,620	12.0
1960.....	43,313	25,327	9,603	3,922	4,462	10.7
1950.....	38,686	24,593	7,227	2,780	2,927	9.3
Female						
1975.....	54,806	19,665	22,510	6,619	6,011	12.3
1970.....	51,506	21,825	20,083	5,191	4,408	12.2
1965.....	48,481	23,151	17,264	4,520	3,546	12.1
1960.....	46,281	25,607	13,474	4,393	2,807	12.1
1950.....	40,654	24,590	9,744	3,231	2,167	10.0
BLACK						
Male						
1975.....	4,924	2,878	1,236	479	331	10.7
1970.....	4,619	3,120	1,025	261	212	9.6
1965.....	4,398	3,261	706	212	217	8.7
1960.....	4,684	3,745	570	205	164	7.9
1950.....	3,729	3,162	253	98	69	6.4
Female						
1975.....	6,171	3,499	1,764	526	382	11.1
1970.....	5,470	3,565	1,333	330	240	10.2
1965.....	5,098	3,648	979	238	229	9.3
1960.....	5,187	3,982	793	228	185	8.5
1950.....	4,068	3,403	342	121	92	7.1

Source: U.S. Census of Population: 1950, Volume IV. Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter B, "Education." table 5. (Total includes not reported on educational attainment, not shown separately.) U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Subject Reports, "Educational Attainment." Final Report, PC(2)-5B. table 1. Current Population Reports. "Educational Attainment." Series P-20, Nos. 158 and 207. table 1.

Table E. Number of Persons 25 to 64 Years Old Who Have Completed 4 Years of High School or More,
by Major Occupation Group and Sex: 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1975

(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation group and sex	1975	1970	1960	1950
Male, 25 to 64 years old.....	27,831	24,022	16,438	11,266
Prof., technical, and kindred workers..	6,356	5,593	3,592	2,200
Managers, and adm., except farm.....	5,566	5,076	2,773	2,071
Sales workers.....	2,066	1,696	1,528	1,174
Clerical and kindred workers.....	2,016	2,006	1,487	1,139
Craft and kindred workers.....	5,343	4,406	2,842	1,887
Operatives, including transport workers.....	3,271	3,013	1,882	1,310
Laborers, except farm.....	799	593	386	288
Service workers.....	1,687	1,018	632	441
Farmers and farm managers.....	605	540	583	579
Farm laborers and supervisors.....	122	79	82	104
Female, 25 to 64 years old.....	18,102	14,453	8,739	5,258
Prof., technical, and kindred workers..	4,218	3,349	2,061	1,366
Managers, and adm., except farm.....	1,253	878	436	314
Sales workers.....	1,156	935	653	438
Clerical and kindred workers.....	7,161	5,793	3,411	1,962
Craft and kindred workers.....	253	152	91	64
Operatives, including transport workers.....	1,276	1,245	688	446
Laborers, except farm.....	117	35	22	18
Service workers.....	2,505	1,943	903	510
Farmers and farm managers.....	51	23	30	19
Farm laborers and supervisors.....	111	98	47	54

Source: U.S. Census of Population: 1950. Vol. IV, Special Reports Part 5, Chapter B, "Education." Table 11. (Total includes a small number of persons who did not report an occupation.)

U.S. Census of Population: 1960. Subject Reports. "Educational Attainment." Final Report PC(2)-5B. Table 8.

Current Population Reports. "Educational Attainment: October 1970," Series P-20, No. 207. Table 6.

Table 4 of this report.