

# Retail Workers: 2018

## American Community Survey Reports

By D. Augustus Anderson and Lynda Laughlin

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### INTRODUCTION

The retail workforce has a substantial presence in the American labor force. In 2018, 9.8 million workers were employed as either retail salespersons, cashiers, or first-line supervisors of retail sales workers. They are also some of the most common occupations in the United States (Table 1).

Since the 1970s, employment in the retail sector has expanded as consumer spending increased and the rise of dual-earner households in the 1980s led to an increased supply of female workers.<sup>1</sup> Through the early 2000s and post Great Recession period, the retail industry has been shaped by larger economic forces, such as the consolidation of retail stores and the growth of online retail options, that may limit the growth of “brick and mortar” retail stores and limit the demand for retail workers.<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) recently projected that employment in retail sales occupations would decrease by 2.0 percent between 2018 and 2028, below the average of 5.0 percent for all occupations.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, a health crisis of unprecedented size, has caused major

disruptions in economic activities in the United States and around the world. Data from the BLS show that total nonfarm payroll employment declined by 20.5 million in April 2020. The retail trade industry alone lost 2.1 million jobs.<sup>4</sup> Retail workers have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic for many reasons including stay-at-home orders that threaten their earnings. For those that continued to work, many were in work environments that put them in direct contact with others, increasing their likelihood of infection.

This report provides a detailed description of the demographic and employment characteristics of retail workers using the most recently available data from the 2018 American Community Surveys (ACS) 1-year estimates, as well as the 2000 Census and 2010 ACS 1-year estimates.<sup>5</sup> The 2018 ACS 1-year estimates collected data on occupations throughout calendar year 2018, thus these data necessarily reflect the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of that, these data will provide a solid baseline for understanding the impact of the economic crisis and recession that began in February 2020.<sup>6</sup> This report focuses on the numbers and characteristics of some of the most common sales and related occupations—first line supervisors of retail sales workers, cashiers, and

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kuhn and Barry Bluestone, “Economics Restructuring and the Female Labor Market: The Impact of Industrial Change on Women,” *Women, Households, and the Economy*, eds. Lourdes Beneria and Catherine R. Stimpston, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1987, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Hortacsu and Chad Syverson, “The Ongoing Evolution of US Retail: A Format of Tug-of-War,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 29 (4), 2015, p. 89.

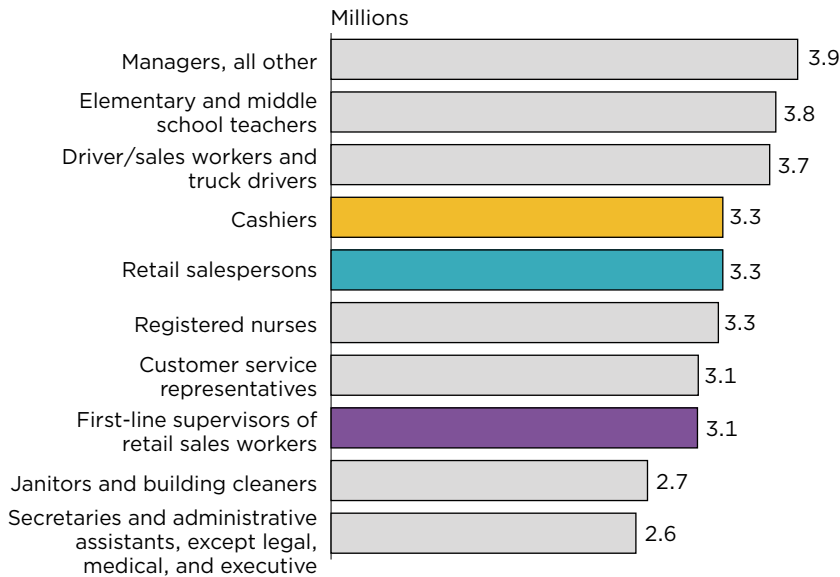
<sup>3</sup> See <[www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/retail-sales-workers.htm#tab-6](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/retail-sales-workers.htm#tab-6)>.

<sup>4</sup> See <[www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit\\_05082020.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_05082020.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. CBDRB-FY20-POP001-0058.

<sup>6</sup> NBER <[www.nber.org/cycles/june2020.html](http://www.nber.org/cycles/june2020.html)>.

Figure 1.  
**Selected Largest Occupations: 2018**  
 (Civilian labor force, 16 years and over)



Note: For more information, visit [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

retail salespersons, collectively referred to in this report as retail workers.<sup>7</sup>

## HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2018, 9.8 million workers were employed as retail salespersons, cashiers, or first-line supervisors of retail sales workers. Together, these three detailed occupations accounted for 6.3 percent of the total labor force.
- Over half of all retail workers were aged 16 to 34. Cashiers had the youngest age profile with 48.3 percent between the ages of 16 and 24.

<sup>7</sup> First-line supervisors, cashiers, and retail salespersons are part of the major occupational group, sales and related occupations. This major group includes 18 detailed occupations including telemarketers, insurance sales agents, and counter and rental clerks. See the 2018 Census Occupation Code list for additional details, [www.census.gov/topics/employment/industry-occupation/guidance/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/employment/industry-occupation/guidance/code-lists.html).

- Women were less likely than men to manage or supervise retail workers. About 47 percent of first-line supervisors of retail workers were women, compared with 53.4 percent who were men.
- Black and Hispanic retail workers were less likely than White retail workers to be in supervisory positions like first-line supervisors of retail sales workers.
- Cashiers were among the lowest paid members of the retail workforce. In 2018, the median earnings for full-time, year-round cashiers were \$22,109, compared with \$35,301 for retail salespersons and \$42,421 for first-line supervisors of retail salespersons.
- Around 25 percent of cashiers were covered by Medicaid at

some point in 2018, compared with 12.6 percent of retail salespersons and 7.8 percent of first-line supervisors of retail workers.

## EMPLOYMENT IN RETAIL OCCUPATIONS

With over 550 occupations classified by the Census Bureau, the distribution of America's labor force is concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations.<sup>8,9</sup> Together, the three detailed occupations that make up retail workers account for about 9.8 million workers, or 6.3 percent of the total labor force in 2018 (Figures 1 and 2). Retail salespersons and cashiers include over 3.3 million workers each, followed by first-line supervisors of retail sales workers with 3.1 million workers.<sup>10</sup> Other large occupations include elementary and middle school teachers, registered nurses, and janitors and building cleaners (Figure 1).

Despite ongoing technological changes in ways customers interact with retail businesses and the general consolidation of retail stores, there has been little change in the relative number

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Jeffrey Rosenthal, "Detailed Occupations and Median Earnings: 2008," Working Paper, U.S. Census Bureau, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Occupation statistics are compiled from data coded based on the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) unless otherwise stated. All federal statistical agencies use the SOC to classify workers into occupational categories. The SOC manual is available online at [www.bls.gov/soc](http://www.bls.gov/soc).

<sup>10</sup> The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual values because of sampling variation or other factors. All comparisons made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

## KEY DEFINITIONS AND OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

### Retail workers include the following detailed occupations:

**First-line supervisors of retail sales workers** directly supervise and coordinate activities of retail sales workers in an establishment or department. Duties may include management functions, such as purchasing, budgeting, accounting, and personnel work, in addition to supervisory duties.

**Cashiers** receive and disburse money in establishments other than financial institutions. Many use electronic scanners, cash registers, or related equipment. May process credit or debit card transactions and validate checks.

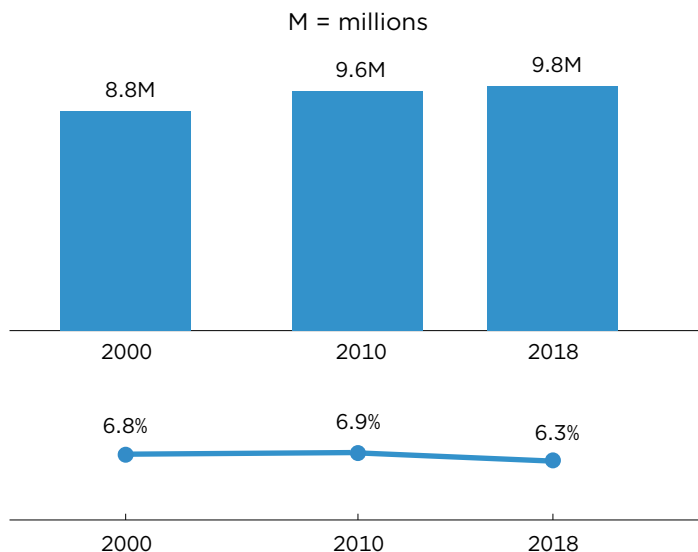
**Retail salespersons** sell merchandise such as furniture, motor vehicles, appliances, or apparel to consumers.

### Census Occupational Classifications

Occupation statistics are compiled from data that are coded based on the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) manual. Census Bureau occupation codes, based on the 2018 SOC, provide 570 specific occupational categories arranged into 23 major occupational groups. The retail occupations selected for this report are part of sales and related occupations major occupational group. This major group includes 18 detailed occupations including telemarketers, insurance sales agents, and counter and rental clerks. See the 2018 Census Occupation Code list for additional details at <[www.census.gov/topics/employment/industry-occupation/guidance/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/employment/industry-occupation/guidance/code-lists.html)>.

For more information on the 2018 SOC, see <[www.bls.gov/soc/2018/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/soc/2018/home.htm)>.

Figure 2.  
**Retail Workers: Total and Percentage of Civilian Labor Force: 2000, 2010, and 2018**



Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2010 and 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

or share of retail workers.<sup>11</sup> In 2018, there were 9.8 million retail workers, up from 8.8 million workers in 2000 (Figure 2). Retail workers' share of total employment over this same time period fell slightly between 2010 and 2018, from 6.9 percent to 6.3 percent, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

### CHARACTERISTICS OF RETAIL WORKERS

Retail jobs offer numerous entry-level employment opportunities and are a common first job for young workers. However, retail jobs are also among those with

<sup>11</sup> Werner Rinartz, "In the Future of Retail, We're Never Not Shopping," *Harvard Business Review*, March 10, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Estimates presented in this report do not reflect any possible economic impacts related to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, but instead serve as a precrisis benchmark for future research. Additional resources on more current workforce dynamics can be found at <<https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/>>.

the lowest wages and lack access to health insurance or retirement or pension benefits.<sup>13,14</sup> To shed light on this large workforce, this section focuses on select demographic and economic characteristics of retail workers in 2018. Data are presented for all retail workers as well as for each detailed occupation within this group of workers.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Age and Sex

Overall, retail workers are younger than the total workforce, with workers between the ages of 16 and 34 making up the largest share of retail workers (Table 1). About half of employed retail workers fall within this age range, with 29.0 percent between the ages of 16 to 24, and 21.5 percent between the ages of 25 to 34. Across the selected retail occupations, cashiers were some of the youngest, with 48.3 percent between the ages of 16 and 24 and 18.0 percent between the ages of 25 to 34. Among the next youngest were retail salespersons, with 28.6 percent between the ages of 16 and 24 and 20.7 percent between the ages of 25 and 34. In contrast, 8.8 percent of first-line

supervisors of retail sales workers were between the ages of 16 and 24, but the larger share of workers were between the ages of 25 and 34 (26.1 percent).

In general, retail workers were more likely to be women than men (56.5 percent compared with 43.5 percent, respectively). However, the representation of women differs by detailed retail occupations. For example, almost 3 out of 4 cashiers were women, while similar percentages of women and men were employed as retail salespersons (both around 50 percent, respectively). Women were less likely to manage or supervise retail salespersons. About 47 percent of first-line supervisors of retail sales workers were women, compared with 53.4 percent who were men.

### Educational Attainment

Retail workers were less likely to have a bachelor's degree or more compared to the total employed population. In 2018, 18.1 percent of retail workers had a bachelor's degree or more, compared with 35.2 percent of all workers. Among the selected retail-related occupations, 25.8 percent of first-line supervisors and 21.2 percent of retail salespersons had a bachelor's degree, compared with 7.8 percent of cashiers. The lack of a bachelor's degree among retail workers reflects the younger age distribution of this occupation group, especially cashiers.

### Race and Hispanic Origin

The racial and ethnic representation of all retail workers differed little from the overall workforce.<sup>15</sup> About two-thirds of the total workforce in 2018 was non-Hispanic White, compared with 59.5 percent of retail workers. Blacks and Hispanics were relatively more likely to be employed in some type of retail occupation compared to their counterparts in the overall workforce. Asian workers constituted 5.9 percent of retail occupations, compared with 6.1 percent of all workers.

Although a majority of retail workers were non-Hispanic White, the racial and ethnic distribution varies by the selected retail occupations. For example, Black and Hispanic workers were overrepresented in cashier jobs. Nearly a quarter of cashiers were Hispanic, while Hispanics made up 18.7 percent of all retail workers. Black workers made up 12.5 percent of all retail workers but held 16.9 percent of cashier jobs. In contrast, non-Hispanic White retail workers were

<sup>13</sup> Francoise Carre and Chris Tilly, "America's Biggest Low-wage Industry: Continuity and Change in Retail Jobs," *Center for Social Policy Publications*, Paper 22, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Arne L. Kalleberg, Barbara F. Reskin, and Ken Hudson, "Bad Jobs in America: Standard and Nonstandard Employment in Relations and Job Quality in the United States," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65 (2), 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Federal surveys give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group, such as Asian, may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). This report shows data using the first approach (race alone). The use of the single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing the data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. In this report, the term "non-Hispanic White" or "White, not Hispanic" refers to people who are not Hispanic and who reported White and no other race. Because Hispanics may be any race, data for Hispanics overlap with data for racial groups.

Table 1.

**Selected Characteristics of Retail Workers: 2018**

(Civilian employed, 16 years and over)

Characteristics	Total			Retail workers			First-line supervisors of retail sales workers			Cashiers			Retail salespersons			
	Number	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent (±)	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent (±)	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent (±)	
<b>TOTAL</b> . . . . .	<b>156,783,165</b>	<b>142,228</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>X 9,836,330</b>	<b>62,325</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>X 3,134,159</b>	<b>30,369</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>X 3,351,175</b>	<b>36,362</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>X 3,350,996</b>	<b>37,798</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>AGE</b>																
16 to 24 years old . . . . .	20,078,516	53,878	12.8	<0.1	2,855,944	33,587	29.0	0.3	8.8	276,741	10,414	8.8	0.3	1,619,651	26,453	48.3
25 to 34 years old . . . . .	35,510,133	53,593	22.6	<0.1	2,116,093	32,708	21.5	0.3	26.1	817,271	17,434	26.1	0.4	603,933	17,507	18.0
35 to 44 years old . . . . .	32,915,132	55,184	21.0	<0.1	1,513,572	24,290	15.4	0.2	22.6	709,468	16,183	22.6	0.5	348,261	12,443	10.4
45 to 54 years old . . . . .	32,445,012	59,435	20.7	<0.1	1,458,786	18,392	14.8	0.2	21.5	673,983	11,569	21.5	0.3	315,848	9,799	9.4
55 Years and Over . . . . .	35,834,372	71,944	22.9	<0.1	1,891,935	21,444	19.2	0.2	21.0	656,696	12,347	21.0	0.4	463,482	10,829	13.8
<b>SEX</b>																
Male . . . . .	82,216,665	86,762	52.4	<0.1	4,274,134	36,225	43.5	0.3	53.4	1,673,668	24,930	53.4	0.5	929,535	17,326	27.7
Female . . . . .	74,566,500	99,071	47.6	<0.1	5,562,196	46,326	56.5	0.3	46.6	1,460,491	18,622	46.6	0.5	2,421,640	30,843	72.3
<b>RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN</b>																
White, not Hispanic . . . . .	97,448,196	105,374	62.2	<0.1	5,853,665	38,202	59.5	0.3	67.8	2,124,335	24,275	67.8	0.5	1,657,245	19,836	49.5
Black, not Hispanic . . . . .	17,938,178	46,888	11.4	<0.1	1,226,478	22,783	12.5	0.2	9.1	286,521	10,022	9.1	0.3	565,072	16,417	16.9
Asian, not Hispanic . . . . .	9,487,788	32,228	6.1	<0.1	576,195	15,000	5.9	0.1	5.6	176,464	8,661	5.6	0.3	229,914	8,956	6.9
Other race, not Hispanic . . . . .	4,532,899	44,649	2.9	<0.1	344,571	10,960	3.5	0.1	3.1	95,814	5,617	3.1	0.2	137,766	7,343	4.1
Hispanic . . . . .	27,376,104	48,678	17.5	<0.1	1,835,421	30,316	18.7	0.3	14.4	451,025	14,535	14.4	0.4	761,178	18,772	22.7
<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b>																
Less than high school graduate . . . . .	14,168,606	68,837	9.0	<0.1	1,158,305	19,290	11.8	0.2	5.5	171,138	8,428	5.5	0.3	706,177	14,618	21.1
High school graduate (includes equivalent) . . . . .	38,226,819	121,574	24.4	0.1	3,096,994	35,257	31.5	0.3	29.2	914,423	17,124	29.2	0.5	1,198,766	22,170	35.8
Some college (includes associate degree) . . . . .	49,132,338	117,168	31.3	0.1	3,799,132	35,851	38.6	0.3	39.5	1,238,952	18,332	39.5	0.5	1,185,088	18,303	35.4
Bachelor's degree or more . . . . .	55,255,402	207,157	35.2	0.1	1,781,899	21,032	18.1	0.2	25.8	809,646	15,217	25.8	0.4	261,144	9,096	7.8
<b>WORK STATUS</b>																
Full-time, year-round . . . . .	111,195,237	124,689	70.9	0.1	5,395,859	37,520	54.9	0.3	84.8	2,658,713	29,016	84.8	0.4	1,022,881	19,793	30.5
Less than full-time, year-round . . . . .	45,587,928	119,742	29.1	0.1	4,440,471	43,690	45.1	0.3	15.2	475,446	12,948	15.2	0.4	2,328,294	31,236	69.5

See notes at end of table.

Table 1.  
**Selected Characteristics of Retail Workers: 2018**—Con.  
 (Civilian employed, 16 years and over)

Characteristics	Total			Retail workers			First-line supervisors of retail sales workers			Cashiers			Retail salespersons								
	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	Mar- gin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Per- cent				
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>																					
Married.....	81,040,215	223,222	51.7	0.1	3,709,042	31,500	37.7	0.3	1,672,015	19,016	53.3	0.5	760,108	14,959	22.7	0.4	1,276,919	19,516	38.1	0.5	
Not married.....	75,742,950	161,816	48.3	0.1	6,127,288	50,712	62.3	0.3	1,462,144	24,762	46.7	0.5	2,591,067	32,254	77.3	0.4	2,074,077	29,715	61.9	0.5	
<b>HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE<sup>2</sup></b>																					
Any coverage.....	140,400,867	223,275	89.6	0.1	8,602,877	57,236	87.5	0.2	2,842,186	29,062	90.7	0.3	2,812,338	32,592	83.9	0.3	2,948,353	34,028	88.0	0.3	
Employer-based.....	109,838,949	231,551	70.1	0.1	5,890,259	48,993	59.9	0.3	2,217,157	28,136	70.7	0.6	1,632,978	25,039	48.7	0.5	2,040,124	28,697	60.9	0.5	
Direct purchase.....	17,887,977	100,010	11.4	0.1	1,272,490	23,041	12.9	0.2	412,607	13,185	13.2	0.4	374,315	10,906	11.2	0.3	485,568	11,089	14.5	0.3	
Medicaid.....	14,180,378	69,908	9.0	<0.1	1,509,337	21,193	15.3	0.2	244,254	8,982	7.8	0.3	843,818	18,423	25.2	0.4	421,265	10,795	12.6	0.3	
Other.....	145,637	5,673	0.1	<0.1	7,946	1,342	0.1	<0.1	1,798	637	0.1	<0.1	1,169	625	<0.1	<0.1	4,979	1,068	0.1	<0.1	
No coverage.....	16,382,298	114,142	10.4	0.1	1,233,453	21,359	12.5	0.2	291,973	11,447	9.3	0.3	538,837	12,846	16.1	0.3	402,643	12,521	12.0	0.3	

X Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup> Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error is in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

<sup>2</sup> People may have more than one type of coverage.

Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

overrepresented in supervisory retail positions. Sixty-eight percent of first-line supervisors of retail sales workers were non-Hispanic White, compared with 62.2 percent of all retail workers. Conversely, Black and Hispanic workers were underrepresented in supervisory positions. Just under 1 in 10 first-line supervisors were Black, while 14.4 percent were Hispanic.

Black and Hispanic employment in retail occupations has been growing since 2000, as has their overall workforce share (Figures 3a and 3b). In 2018, 18.7 percent of retail workers were Hispanic, up from 10.4 percent in 2000. Around 10 percent of retail workers were Black in 2000, which slightly increased to 12.5 percent in 2018. In contrast, non-Hispanic Whites' share of retail workers decreased during the same period, from 74.5 percent in 2000 to 59.5 percent in 2018.

## ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Work Status

Retail workers were less likely to work full-time, year-round compared with the total labor force.<sup>16</sup> In 2018, 54.9 percent of retail workers were employed full-time, year-round, compared with 70.9 percent of all workers. Full-time status varied greatly by detailed retail occupations. First-line supervisors of retail sales workers had the highest percentage of full-time, year-round workers (84.8 percent), followed by retail salespersons (51.2 percent). Under one-third (30.5

<sup>16</sup> Full-time, year-round workers include all people 16 years old and over who usually worked 35 hours or more per week for 50 to 52 weeks in the past 12 months.

percent) of cashiers worked full-time, year-round in 2018.

### Health Insurance Coverage and Poverty Status

For many working-age adults, health insurance coverage and type of coverage are related to work status.<sup>17, 18</sup> Health insurance coverage is common for most workers, including retail workers. In 2018, among all workers, about 9 out of 10 had some type of public or private health insurance coverage at the time of interview. About 88 percent of all retail workers had some form of health insurance. First-line supervisors were more likely to be covered by health insurance (90.7 percent) than retail salespersons (88.0 percent) or cashiers (83.9 percent).

Similar to the general workforce, the most common type of health insurance among all retail workers was employer-based insurance, covering 59.9 percent of this workforce. First-line supervisors were more likely to have employer-based insurance (70.7 percent) than retail salespersons (60.9 percent) and cashiers (48.7 percent). Compared with other retail workers, cashiers were more likely to receive Medicaid, a government-based health insurance plan for low-income people. In 2018, 25.2 percent of cashiers were covered by Medicaid, compared with 12.6

<sup>17</sup> Edward R. Berchick, Jessica C. Barnett, and Rachel D. Upton, "Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2018" *Current Population Reports*, P60-267, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Health insurance coverage is the coverage at the time of interview. The ACS is conducted throughout the year, and the resulting measure of health insurance coverage reflects an annual average of current health insurance coverage status. People may have more than one type of coverage.

percent of retail salespersons and 7.8 percent of first-line supervisors of retail workers. The higher rates of Medicaid coverage among cashiers may be related to several factors. For example, cashiers were more likely to work part-time (Table 1) and were more likely to be in poverty (Figure A-1).<sup>19</sup> These factors may limit their eligibility for employer-provided health insurance or make them less financially able to purchase it. Furthermore, workers with low total income may qualify for government health care plans.<sup>20</sup>

### Median Earnings of Retail Workers

With 9.8 million workers, retail occupations are some of the most common occupations in the United States. Yet, these occupations are often low-paying and offer limited opportunities for advancement.<sup>21</sup> Figure 4 shows the median earnings of full-time, year-round workers by detailed retail occupation and selected characteristics.

Women consistently earned less than men across detailed retail sales occupations. In 2018, women who worked full-time, year-round as first-line supervisors of retail sales workers had

<sup>19</sup> Poverty statistics in ACS products adhere to standards specified by the Office of Management and Budget and in Statistical Policy Directive 14. For more information, see page 107 of "American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey 2018 Subject Definitions" at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html)>.

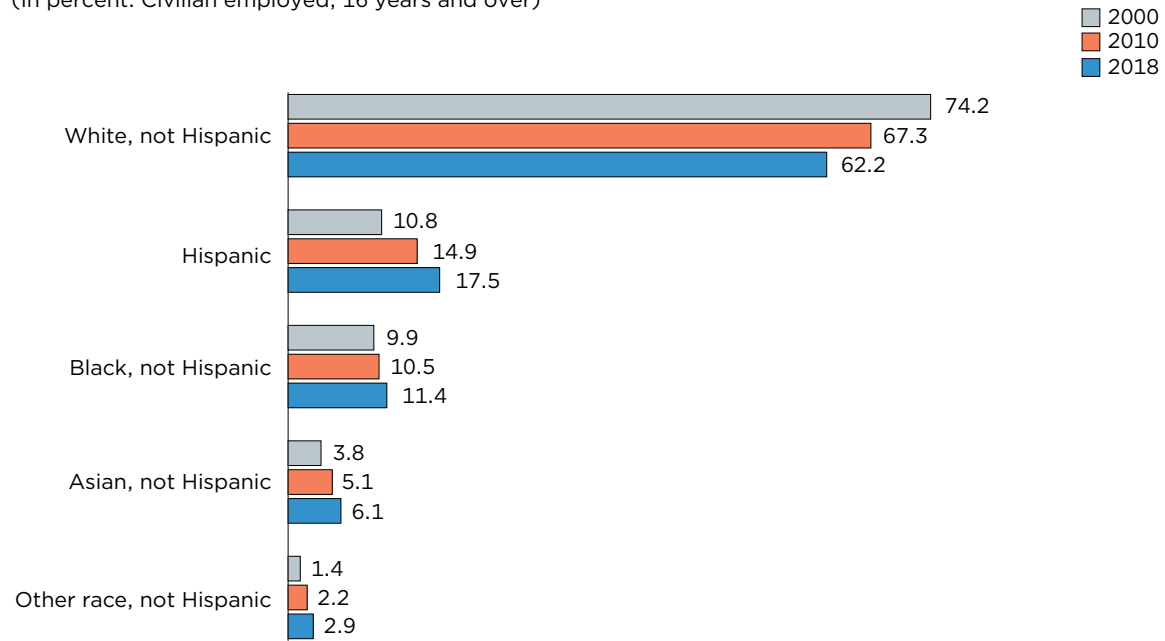
<sup>20</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Low-wage Workers: Poverty and Use of Selected Federal Social Safety Net Programs Persist among Working Families," GAO-17-677, Washington, DC, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Liana Christin Landivar and Julia Beckhusen, "Racial Disparities in Women's Mobility out of Retail and Service Occupations," SEHSD Working Paper 2019-03, Washington, DC, 2019.

Figure 3a.

**Distribution of Total Employment by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000, 2010, and 2018**

(In percent. Civilian employed, 16 years and over)



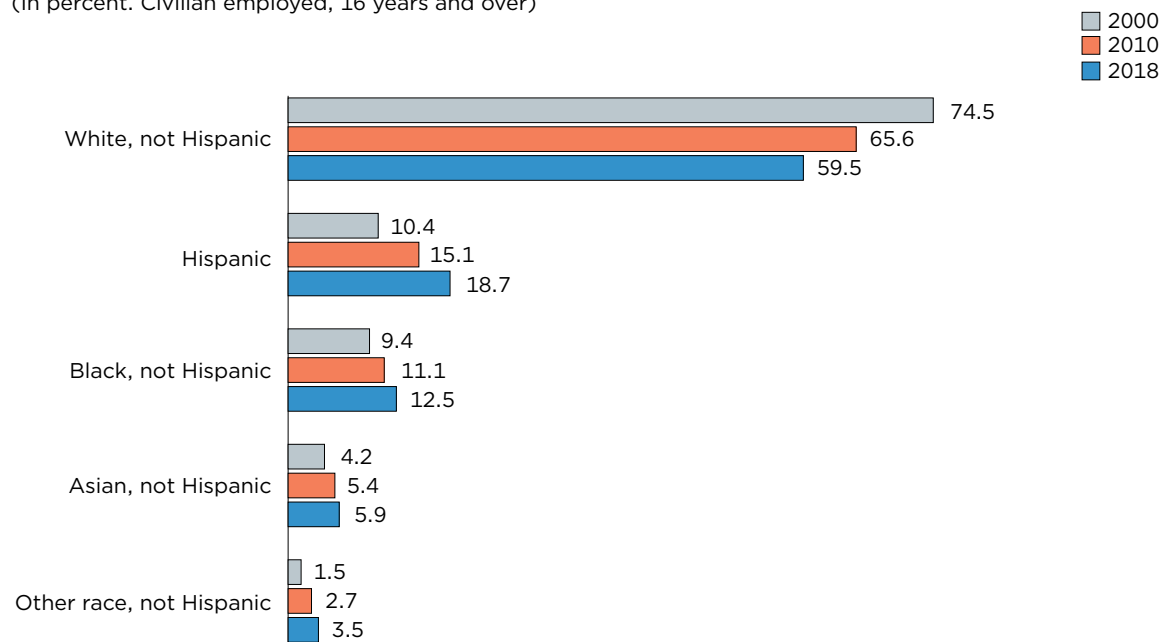
Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2010 and 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

Figure 3b.

**Distribution of Retail Workers by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000, 2010, and 2018**

(In percent. Civilian employed, 16 years and over)



Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2010 and 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.



median earnings of \$36,166, compared with men at \$50,319. Female cashiers and retail salespersons earned \$21,664 and \$29,246, respectively, compared with male cashiers and retail salespersons who had median earnings of \$24,477 and \$40,600, respectively.

Earning differences persist by race and Hispanic-origin. Some of the biggest gaps were among retail salespersons. Hispanic and Black retail salespersons earned about \$10,000 less per year compared with White workers in the same occupation. Among full-time, year-round workers, White retail salespersons' median earnings were \$39,665, compared with \$28,896 for Hispanics. The earnings gap was

narrower among first-line supervisors of retail sales workers. Whites earned the most among this occupation group (\$45,453), compared with \$37,374 for Hispanics and \$37,503 for Black first-line supervisors of retail sales workers.

Even within the same retail occupation, more education could lead to higher median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. For example, first-line supervisors of retail workers with a bachelor's degree earned over \$15,000 more per year than those with a high school degree (\$55,011 and \$37,375, respectively). Some of this variation may be attributed to age, and some employers may want

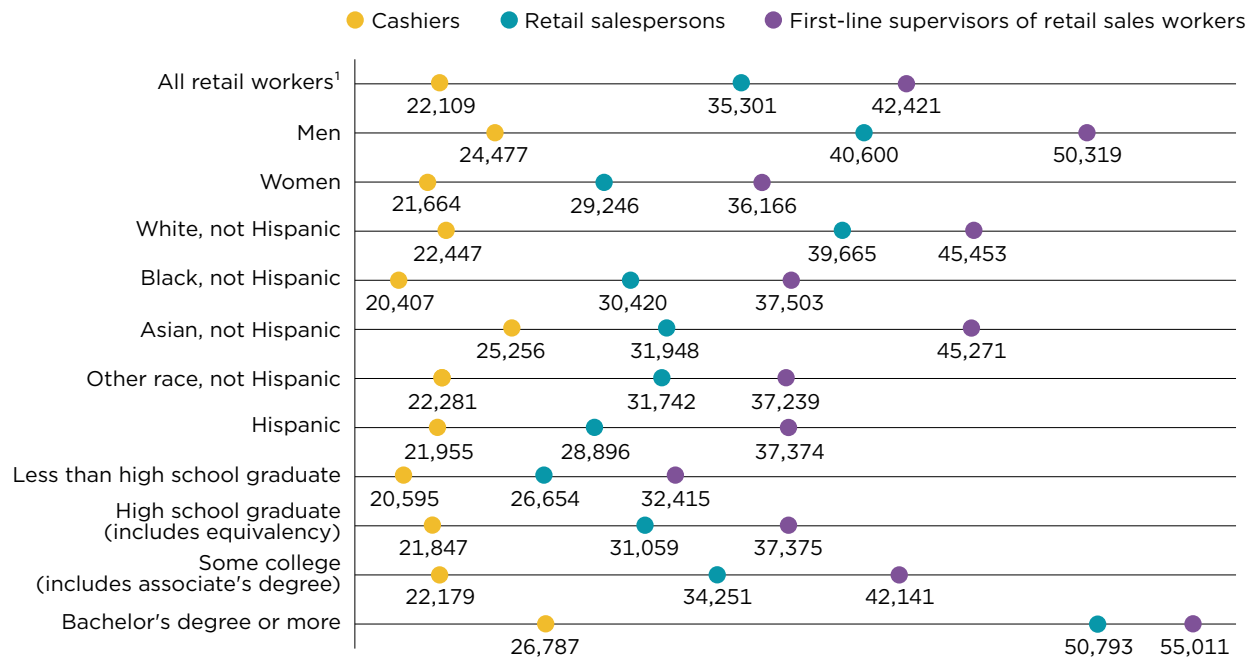
candidates for supervisory positions to have a college degree.<sup>22</sup>

The median earnings of cashiers was around 45 percent less than those of all full-time, year-round workers, (\$22,109 and \$48,565, respectively). First-line supervisors of retail sales workers were among the highest-earning retail occupations, but only first-line supervisors of retail workers with a college degree and male supervisors earned more than the median for all workers in 2018.

Between 2000 and 2018, the real median earnings for full-time, year-round workers

<sup>22</sup> BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, see "Retail Sales Workers," <[www.bls.gov/ooh/](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/)>.

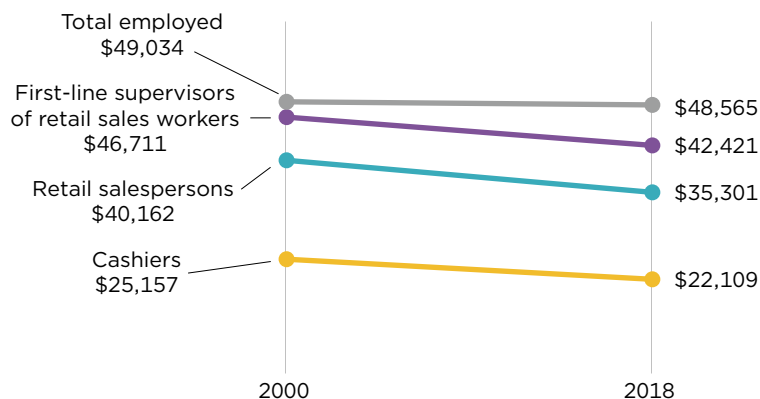
Figure 4.  
**Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Retail Workers by Selected Characteristics: 2018**  
 (Civilian employed, 16 years and over, with earnings in dollars)



<sup>1</sup> The median earnings for all full-time, year-round workers in 2018 was \$48,565. Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs/](http://www.census.gov/acs/)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

Figure 5.  
**Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Retail Workers  
 in 2018 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars: 2000 and 2018**

(Civilian employed, 16 years and over, with earnings)



Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and

2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

decreased by less than \$500, from \$49,034 to \$48,565, respectively (Figure 5).<sup>23</sup> The median earnings for selected retail occupations also declined during the same period. The median earnings of first-line supervisors of retail sales workers decreased from \$46,711 in 2000 to \$42,421 in 2018. The median earnings of retail salespersons and cashiers decreased from \$40,162 and \$25,157 in 2000, respectively, to \$35,300 and \$22,109 in 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Estimates in this report are inflation-adjusted to 2018 dollars. “Real” refers to earnings after adjusting for inflation.

## RETAIL WORKERS BY INDUSTRY

Industry refers to the kind of business conducted by a person’s employing organization. Some occupation groups are related closely to certain industries.<sup>24</sup> Retail workers are primarily employed in two industries. In 2018, over 8 out of every 10 retail workers worked in the retail trade industry (Figure 6). The retail

<sup>24</sup> Written responses to industry questions on the ACS are coded using the industry classification system developed for the census in 2010, modified in 2012, and again in 2017. The Census Industry Classification system was developed from the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). This Census Industry Code list consists of 269 categories for employed people, including military, classified into 20 sectors.

trade sector comprises establishments engaged in retailing merchandise, primarily through physical retail store locations. Just over 1 million, or 10.8 percent of, retail workers were employed in the arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services.<sup>25</sup> These two industries combined accounted for 96.0 percent of retail workers. Retail salespersons (95.3 percent), first-line supervisors of retail workers (94.5 percent), and cashiers (66.4 percent) were well distributed across the retail trade industry. In contrast, 27.8 percent of cashiers were employed in the arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services industry, while 1.6 percent of first-line supervisors and 2.5 percent of retail salespersons were employed in this sector.

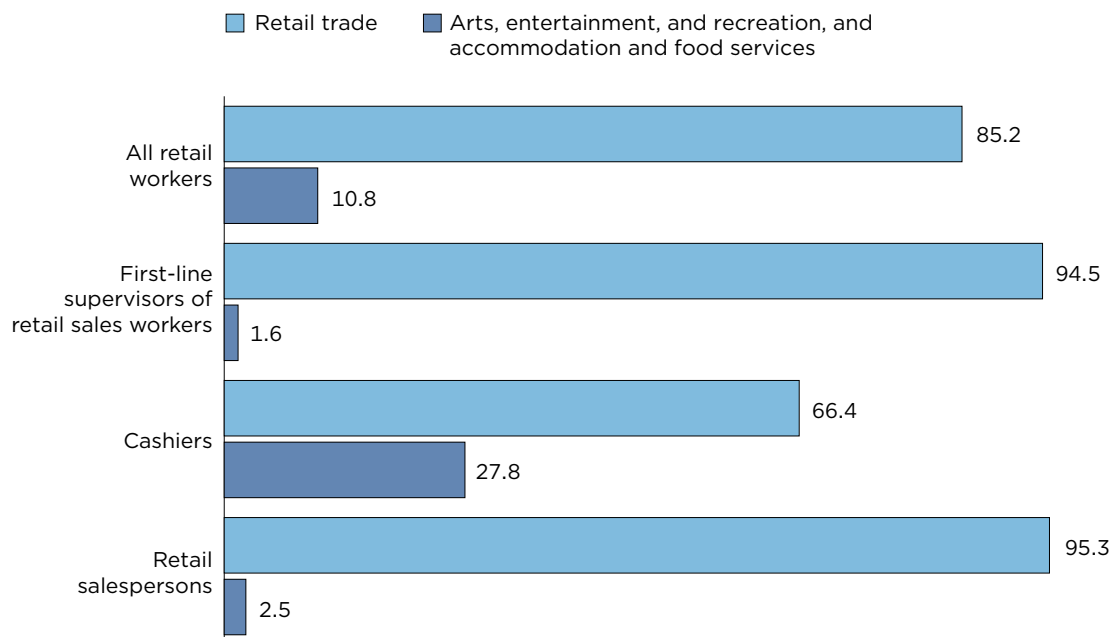
Given that well over a majority of retail workers are in the retail trade industry, the next section examines how retail workers are distributed across a sector that comprises both retail and nonretail stores. Additionally, this section examines how the numbers of retail workers across this sector has changed over time.

<sup>25</sup> The arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services industry includes a wide range of establishments that operate facilities or provide services to meet varied cultural, entertainment, lodging, food services, and recreation interests of their patrons. For more information, see <[www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/](http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/)>.

Figure 6.

### Percentage of Retail Workers by Selected Industry Groups: 2018

(Civilian employed, 16 years and over)



Note: For more information, visit [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

Figure 7 shows the number of retail workers by selected detailed retail trade industries in 2010 and 2018. Around 1.3 million retail workers worked in grocery stores in 2010, not statistically different from the number of workers in 2018. However, the count of retail workers who worked in general merchandise stores, including warehouse clubs and supercenters, dropped from over 1.1 million to around 865,000, amounting to a loss of over 280,000 retail workers. In contrast, the number of retail workers in department stores

increased from around 389,000 retail workers in 2010 to about 535,000 retail workers in 2018.

Research suggests that e-commerce will assume a larger role in the retail sector, particularly the electronic shopping and mail-order houses industry.<sup>26, 27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The electronic shopping and mail-house industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in retailing all types of merchandise using nonstore means, such as catalogs, toll-free telephone numbers, or electronic media such as interactive television or the Internet. For more information, see [www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/](http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/).

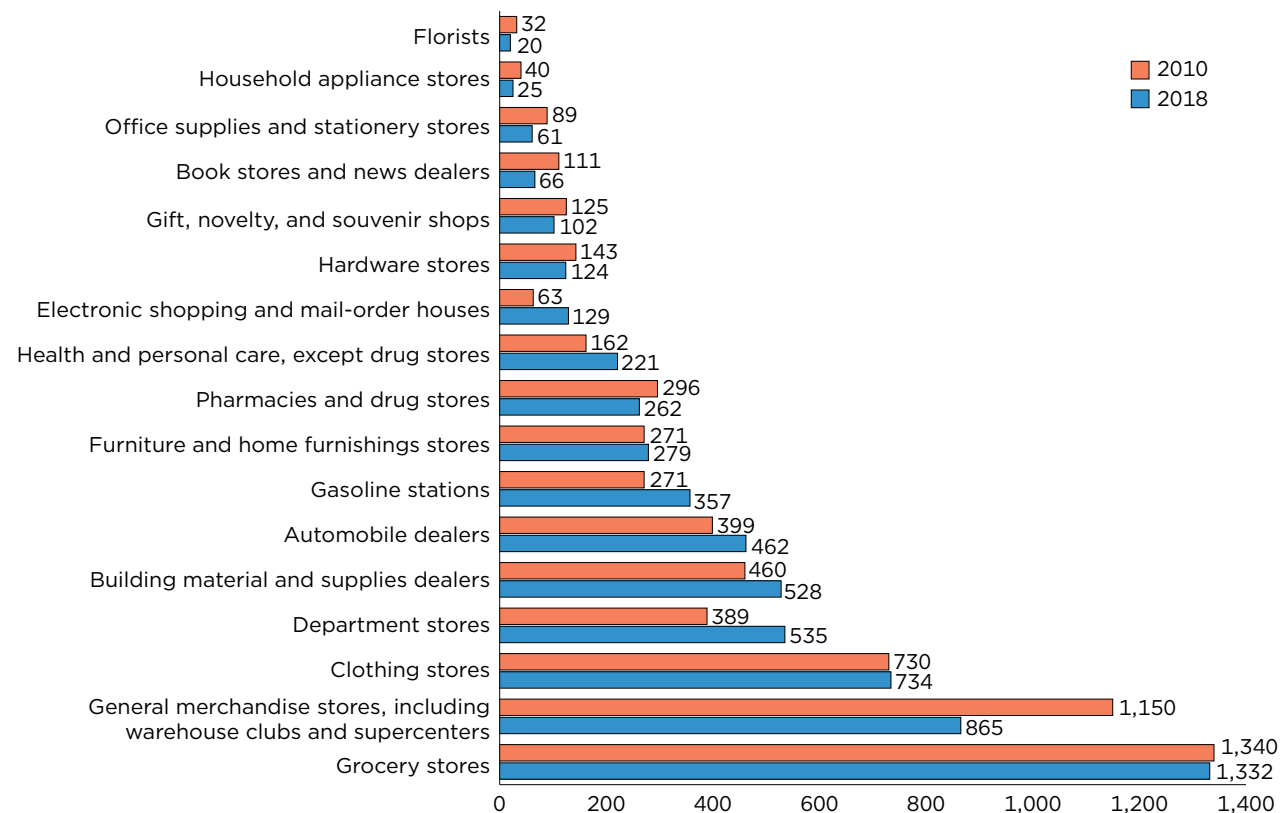
<sup>27</sup> Michael Mandel, "How Ecommerce Creates Jobs and Reduces Income Inequality," Progressive Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2017.

Data from the ACS show that the number of retail workers in electronic shopping increased from 63,000 in 2010 to around 129,000 in 2018. However, retail workers were still more likely to be employed in retail industries most associated with brick-and-mortar retail locations such as book stores and news dealers; gift, novelty, and souvenir shops; and clothing stores.

Figure 7.

**Retail Workers by Selected Retail Industries: 2010 and 2018**

(In thousands. Civilian employed, 16 years and over)



Note: Industry data from 2010 was converted to the 2017 Census Industry Code list to make them comparable over time.

For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

**SUMMARY**

Although retail workers comprised only three detailed occupations, they accounted for 6.3 percent of the total labor force, or 9.8 million workers. The majority of retail workers had a younger age profile, were less likely to hold a bachelor’s degree, and were less likely to work full-time, year-round when compared with the total labor force.

Of retail workers, women on average earned less than men, and also were less likely to serve

in supervisory positions. Black and Hispanic workers were overrepresented in cashier jobs, which were the lowest paying jobs in retail. In contrast, non-Hispanic White retail workers were overrepresented in supervisory retail positions, the highest paying jobs in retail (albeit declining over the past decade). Although health insurance coverage was common for retail workers, cashiers were more likely to receive Medicaid (a government-based health insurance plan for low-income people), which could be attributed

to the fact that cashiers were more likely to work part-time and more likely to have incomes below the poverty threshold. Retail occupations are among the lowest-paying jobs, with limited opportunities for advancement. The continued growth of retail workers over the past decade, coupled with their number, confirms the essential need to understand the nature and quality of these jobs.

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## SOURCE OF THE ESTIMATES

The ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2005, ACS data have been released annually for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

## ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Data presented in this brief are based on people and households that responded to the ACS in 2018 and are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. Due to rounding, some details may not sum to totals. For information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the “ACS Accuracy of the Data” document at [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html).

## CONTACT

For questions related to the contents of this report and the accompanying tables, contact the authors:

D. Augustus Anderson  
<Donovan.Augustus.Anderson@  
census.gov>

Lynda Laughlin  
<Lynda.L.Laughlin@census.gov>

Industry and Occupation  
Statistics Branch  
Social, Economic, and Housing  
Statistics Division  
U.S. Census Bureau  
(301) 763-3239

## SUGGESTED CITATION

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Appendix Table A-1.

**Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Retail Workers by Selected Characteristics: 2018**

(Civilian employed, 16 years and over)

Characteristics	Median earnings (dollars) <sup>1</sup>					
	First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	Margin of error <sup>2</sup> (±)	Cashiers	Margin of error <sup>2</sup> (±)	Retail salespersons	Margin of error <sup>2</sup> (±)
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	<b>42,421</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>22,109</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>35,301</b>	<b>334</b>
<b>SEX</b>						
Male .....	50,319	302	24,477	739	40,600	361
Female .....	36,166	340	21,664	191	29,246	571
<b>RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN</b>						
White, not Hispanic.....	45,453	319	22,447	329	39,665	824
Black, not Hispanic .....	37,503	1,753	20,407	469	30,420	738
Asian, not Hispanic .....	45,271	2,365	25,256	780	31,948	823
Other race, not Hispanic .....	37,239	1,189	22,281	1,176	31,742	1,137
Hispanic.....	37,374	994	21,955	320	28,896	1,069
<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b>						
Less than high school graduate .....	32,415	1,149	20,595	435	26,654	1,252
High school graduate (includes equivalency) ...	37,375	497	21,847	257	31,059	416
Some college (includes associate degree).....	42,141	323	22,179	276	34,251	849
Bachelor's degree or more .....	55,011	1,229	26,787	653	50,793	612

<sup>1</sup> The median earnings for all full-time, year-round workers in 2018 was \$48,565 with a margin of error of 125.

<sup>2</sup> Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error is in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

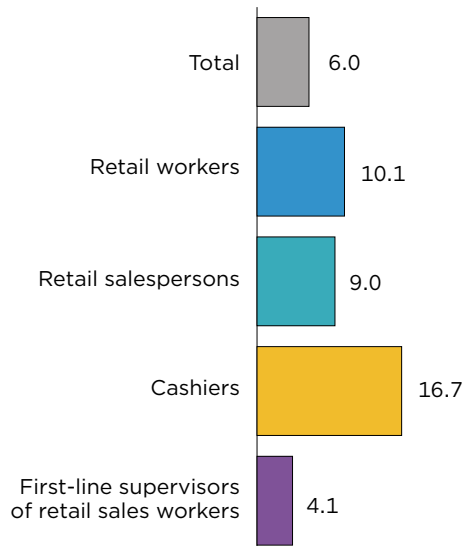
Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

Appendix Figure A-1.

**Percentage of Workers in Poverty by Selected Retail Occupations: 2018**

(Civilian labor force, 16 years and over)



Note: For more information, visit <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.