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# Profile of the Teenage Worker



U.S. Department of Labor  
Bureau of Labor Statistics  
October 1980

Bulletin 2039





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U.S. Department of Labor  
Ray Marshall, Secretary

Bureau of Labor Statistics  
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October 1980

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This bulletin focuses on the labor market experience of 16- to 19-year-olds. Based on data from the Current Population Survey, the bulletin reviews past trends and recent developments and explores the problems of youth unemployment and the transition from school to work.

The bulletin was prepared by Diane N. Westcott, an economist in the Office of Current Employment Analysis. Unless specifically identified as copyright, material in this publication is in the public domain and may, with appropriate credit, be reproduced without permission.

## Preface

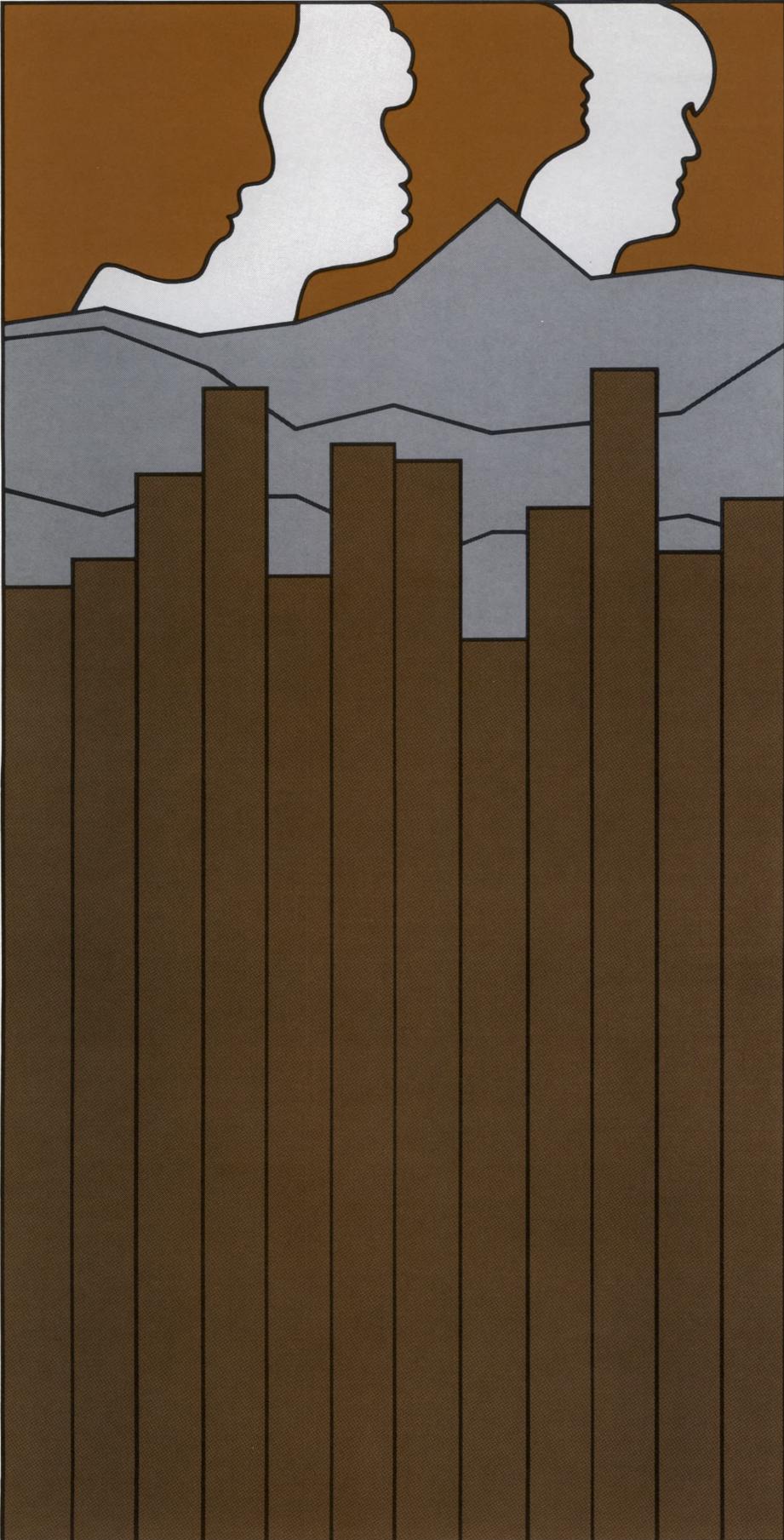


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# Profile of the Teenage Worker





By most measures, teenagers have a difficult time in the labor force. Specifically, their unemployment rate is the highest of all the age groups, the types of jobs they hold have limited prospects, and their wages are low. Further, some teenagers face problems associated with the transition from school to work which typically is marked by intermittent employment. And, on average, those having the most difficult labor market experiences as youth can be expected to have difficulties later on.

There are, however, some mitigating factors regarding youth unemployment. Almost one-half of the unemployed 16- to 19-year-olds are in school and seeking only part-time work, and most of them live with their parents. Two-thirds of the unemployed teenagers are either looking for their first job or are looking for a new job after being out of the labor force. Unemployment for these teenagers is not unexpected; finding a job when one has never worked, or has been out of the labor market for a while, takes time. Finally, the duration of unemployment is shorter for teenagers, on average, than for adults.<sup>1</sup>

These broad statistics on teenage unemployment, however, do not fully illuminate their problems. For many youths, unemployment is a temporary and minor problem associated with finding an afterschool job or the first full-time job. However, the share of

total family income accounted for by teenagers can be significant in low-income families. For some teenagers, a prolonged period of unemployment or a prolonged period of intermittent unemployment can result in a serious loss of income, and the loss or postponement of opportunities to develop skills and work habits, though unfortunately not much is known about the cumulative effects of periodic unemployment on the later employment experience of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident from the statistics that the labor market experience of several groups of teenagers demands our attention, particularly the experience of black youths and high school dropouts, both of whom have especially high unemployment rates. Black youth unemployment not only is very high, but, unlike unemployment among white youth, has shown an adverse long-term trend. Also, the labor force participation of young blacks has been falling. There is clearly a need to investigate the employment situation of teenagers and to focus specifically on those who bear the brunt of unemployment.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Osterman, "Youth, Work, and Unemployment," *Challenge*, May-June 1978, pp. 65-69.

<sup>2</sup> "Policy Options for the Teenage Unemployment Problem," Background Paper No. 13 (Congressional Budget Office, 1976).

# I. Trends Over Three Decades

The size of the Nation's youth population has changed dramatically over the last three decades (table 1). After falling in the early 1950's, the number of youths jumped substantially in the early 1960's but the rate of growth declined somewhat in the early 1970's. Projections through 1990 indicate that the teenage population will decline, from 16.4 million in 1979 to 13.1 million by 1990. Population growth has been more rapid for black than for white youth over the last several decades, and projections for the next decade show a slower rate of decline for black youth.

The teenage labor force is also projected to decline between 1979 and 1990, from 9.5 million to 7.6 million, with the completion of the entry into the labor force of the "baby boom" generation. Because of the teenage population decline, teenagers are expected to represent only 6.7 percent of the labor force by 1990, a significantly smaller proportion than the 9.2 percent they accounted for in 1979.

Labor force participation rates of 16- to 19-year-olds dropped from 51.8 percent to 48.3 percent from 1950 to 1968; however, over the last decade, the teenage participation rate has risen steadily, to 58.1 percent in 1979, as the baby-boom generation entered the labor force with greater frequency than their counterparts before them. While the participation rates for white teenagers and female teenagers have risen continuously since the mid-1960's, the participation rates of black youth have trended downward over this same period.

The drop in labor force participation is particularly serious for young black men and is reflected in the deterioration of their employment-population ratio. The decline in this ratio has two important aspects: (1) A marked rise in the proportion of black men out of the labor force (which contrasts with a stable proportion for young white men) and (2) an increase

in the proportion of black men in the labor force who are unemployed (which also has occurred among whites).<sup>3</sup> This implies that the behavior of youth who are not in the labor force is critical to understanding the black youth employment problem; however, the question of why young black men (and to some degree women) are participating less in the labor market has yet to be answered.

Rising school enrollment rates played a role in the decline of teenage labor force participation in the 1950's and early 1960's. One-half of all teenagers were in school in the early 1950's; by the late 1960's the proportion rose to over two-thirds. While the school enrollment status of teenagers has remained constant over the last 10 years, there has been a marked trend toward widespread participation in the labor market by teenagers enrolled in school, particularly among young women.

To date, teenage population growth has created considerable pressure on the supply side of the youth labor market. Indicative of this pressure has been the persistently high unemployment rate for teenagers throughout the 1960's to the present. The jobless rate for teenagers increased from a comparatively low 7.6 percent in 1953 to 16 percent in 1979, reaching a peak of 20 percent during the 1973-75 recession.

The unemployment rate for teenagers is substantially higher than that for adult workers. The ratio of the rate of teenage to adult (25 years and over) unemployment has varied from 2.7 to 1 in 1954 to 5.5 to 1 in 1968 and 1969. This ratio remained fairly stable at about 3.3 throughout the 1950's and into the early 1960's. However, beginning in 1963 with the entry of the baby-boom population into the labor force, the teenage-adult unemployment rate ratio rose to a record high of 5.5 in the late 1960's before an increase in adult unemployment through the 1970's decreased the ratio to 4.1 in 1979.

Black and other minority teenagers have experienced consistently higher unemployment rates than their white counterparts. The disparity was relatively small in the mid-1950's but increased significantly thereafter. In 1954, the ratio of black and other minority teenage unemployment to white teenage unemployment was 1.4; this ratio increased through the late 1950's and early 1960's, reaching 2.4 in 1967. This ratio was not exceeded until after the 1973-75 recession, when the unemployment rate for white teenagers began declining while that

for blacks and others did not. By 1978, the ratio had climbed to 2.6, with black and other and white teenage unemployment rates of 36.3 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively. However, the unemployment rate for white teenagers was unchanged for 1979 while that for black teenagers declined slightly, causing the ratio to drop to 2.4.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. Freeman, *The Youth Labor Market Problem in the United States: An Overview* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, National Bureau of Economic Research, May 1979).

**TABLE 1.**

**Employment Status of the Teenage Population (16-19 year-olds) by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin. Selected Years, 1950-79.<sup>1</sup>**

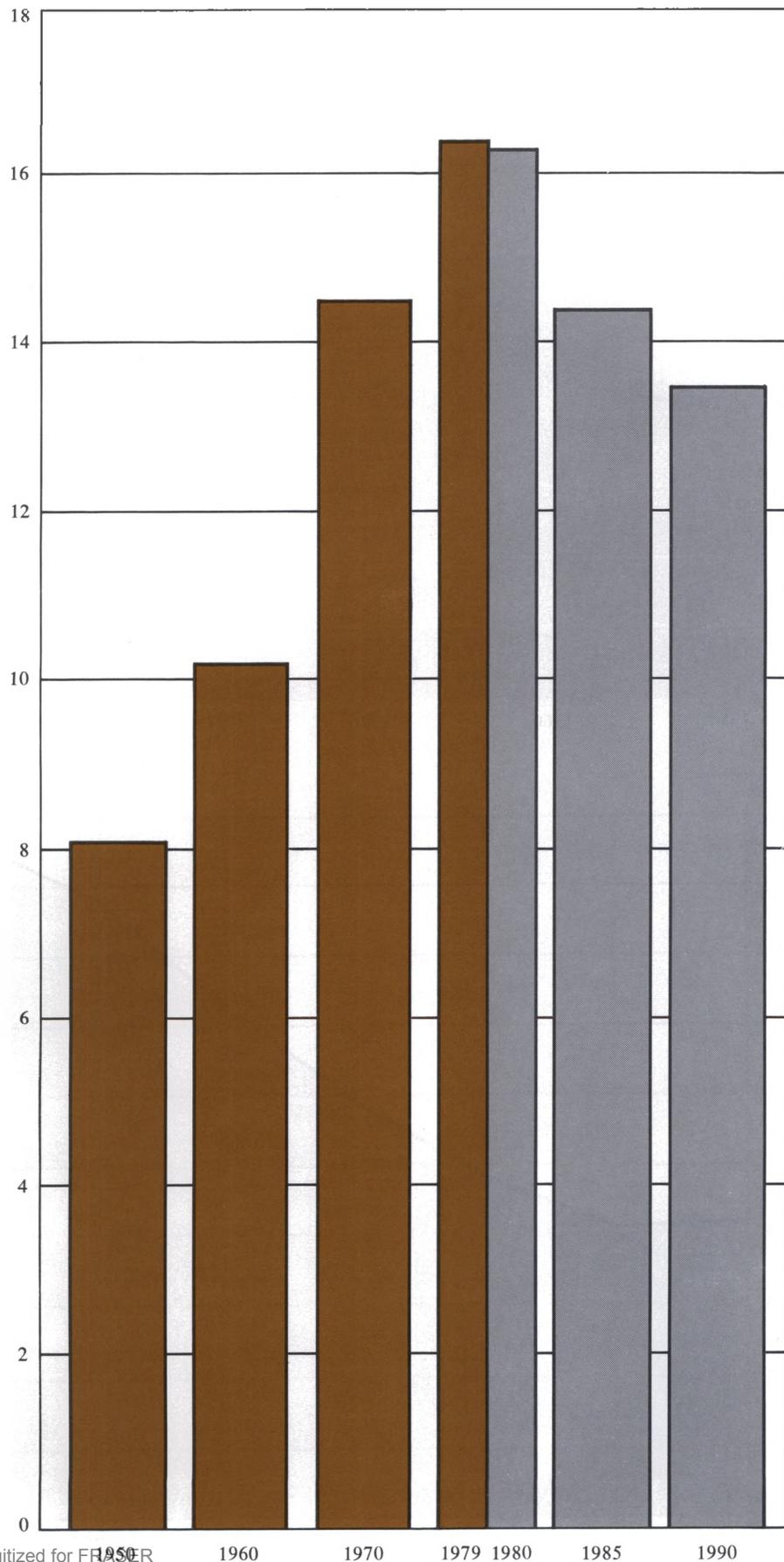
numbers in thousands

<b>Item</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1955</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>1979</b>
<b>Total</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	8,145	8,364	12,930	15,743	16,379
Percent of civilian labor force	4,216	4,092	5,910	8,465	9,512
Participation rate	51.8	48.9	45.7	53.8	58.1
Employed	3,703	3,642	5,036	7,237	7,984
Unemployed	513	450	874	1,226	1,528
Unemployment rate	12.2	11.0	14.8	14.5	16.1
Not in the labor force	3,929	4,272	7,020	7,283	6,867
<b>Men</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	3,963	4,022	6,318	7,801	8,155
Percent of civilian labor force	2,504	2,369	3,397	4,665	5,031
Participation rate	63.2	58.9	53.8	59.8	61.7
Employed	2,186	2,095	2,918	4,018	4,236
Unemployed	318	274	479	647	795
Unemployment rate	12.7	11.6	14.1	13.9	15.8
Not in the labor force	1,459	1,653	2,921	3,136	3,124
<b>Women</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	4,181	4,342	6,612	7,942	8,224
Percent of civilian labor force	1,712	1,723	2,513	3,798	4,481
Participation rate	40.9	39.7	38.0	47.8	54.5
Employed	1,517	1,547	2,118	3,219	3,748
Unemployed	195	176	395	579	733
Unemployment rate	11.4	10.2	15.7	15.2	16.4
Not in the labor force	2,469	2,619	4,099	4,145	3,743
<b>White</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	(2)	7,292	11,319	13,480	13,841
Percent of civilian labor force	(2)	3,598	5,267	7,553	8,475
Participation rate	(2)	49.3	46.5	56.0	61.2
Employed	(2)	3,225	4,562	6,602	7,295
Unemployed	(2)	373	705	951	1,181
Unemployment rate	(2)	10.4	13.4	12.6	13.9
Not in the labor force	(2)	3,696	6,052	5,929	5,366
<b>Black and other</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	(2)	1,071	1,069	2,263	2,539
Percent of civilian labor force	(2)	495	645	909	1,036
Participation rate	(2)	46.2	40.1	40.2	40.8
Employed	(2)	418	474	634	689
Unemployed	(2)	77	171	275	347
Unemployment rate	(2)	15.6	26.5	30.3	33.5
Not in the labor force	(2)	576	964	1,354	1,503
<b>Hispanic</b>					
Civilian noninstitutional population	(2)	(2)	(2)	855	1,061
Percent of civilian labor force	(2)	(2)	(2)	401	535
Participation rate	(2)	(2)	(2)	46.9	50.4
Employed	(2)	(2)	(2)	321	433
Unemployment	(2)	(2)	(2)	79	102
Unemployment rate	(2)	(2)	(2)	19.8	19.1
Not in the labor force	(2)	(2)	(2)	454	526

(1) 1955, 1965, and 1973 were selected for comparison because they were years in which the overall unemployment rate was approximately the same.

(2) Not available.

millions



**CHART 1.**

**Teenage Population, Actual and Projected.**

**Selected Years, 1950-90.**

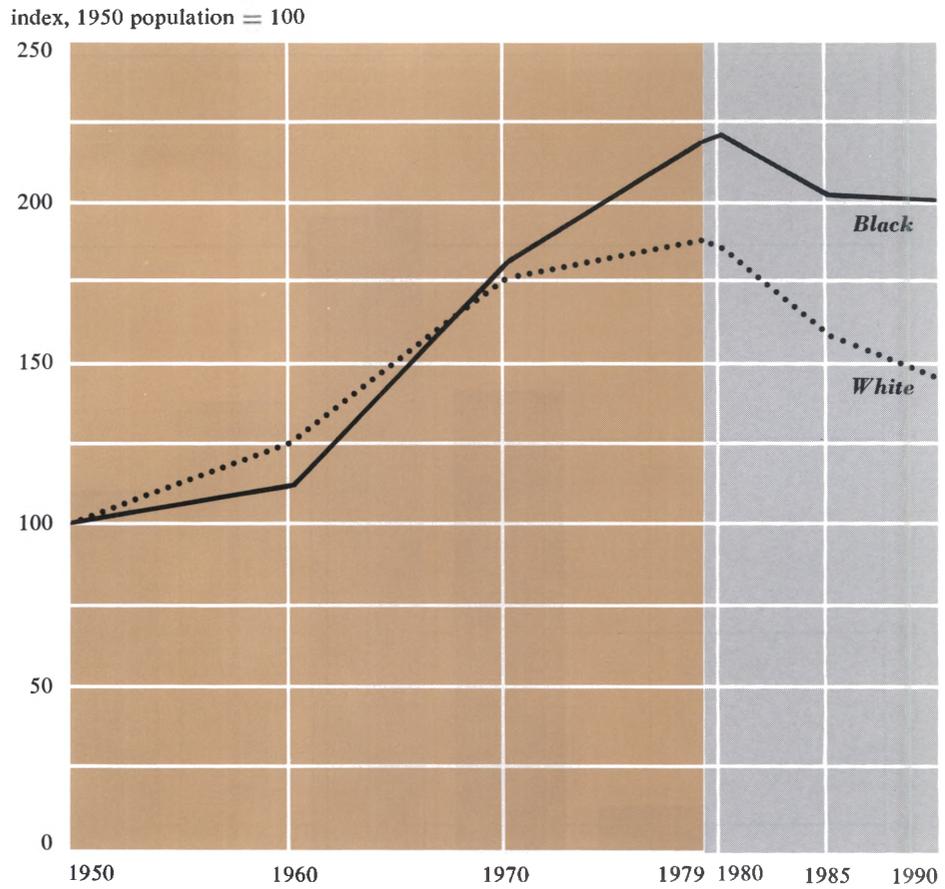
*The teenage population is expected to decline through 1990.*

**CHART 2.**

**Changes in Teenage Population, Actual and Projected, by Race.<sup>1</sup> 1950-90.**

*Population growth has been more rapid for black than for white teenagers over the last several decades, and projections show a slower rate of decline for black youth through 1990.*

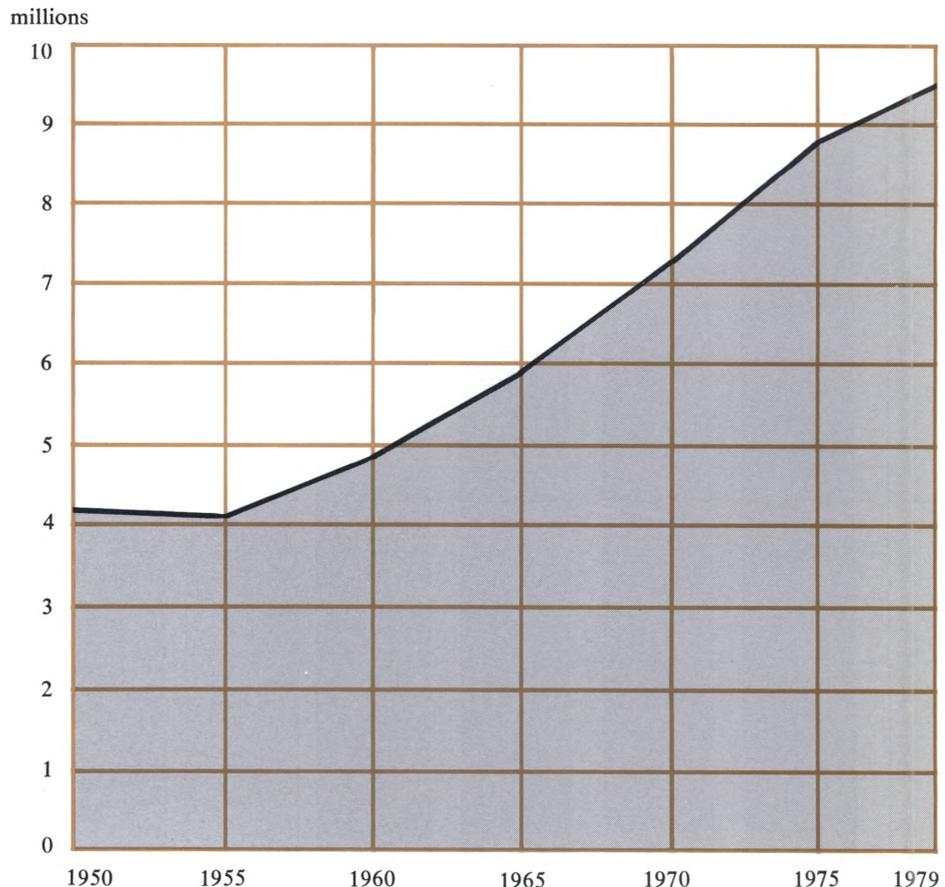
<sup>1</sup>In 1950, the number of black youth includes a relatively small proportion of youth of other minority races.

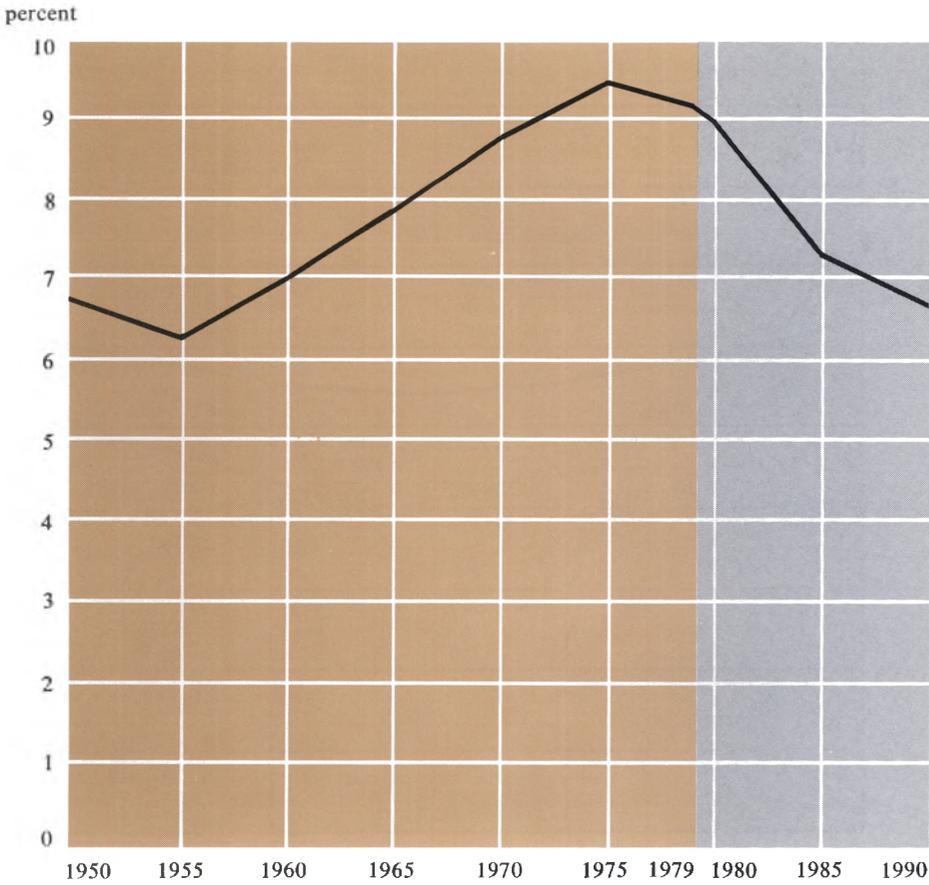


**CHART 3.**

**Teenage Civilian Labor Force. 1950-79.**

*The teenage labor force has risen steadily since 1955.*



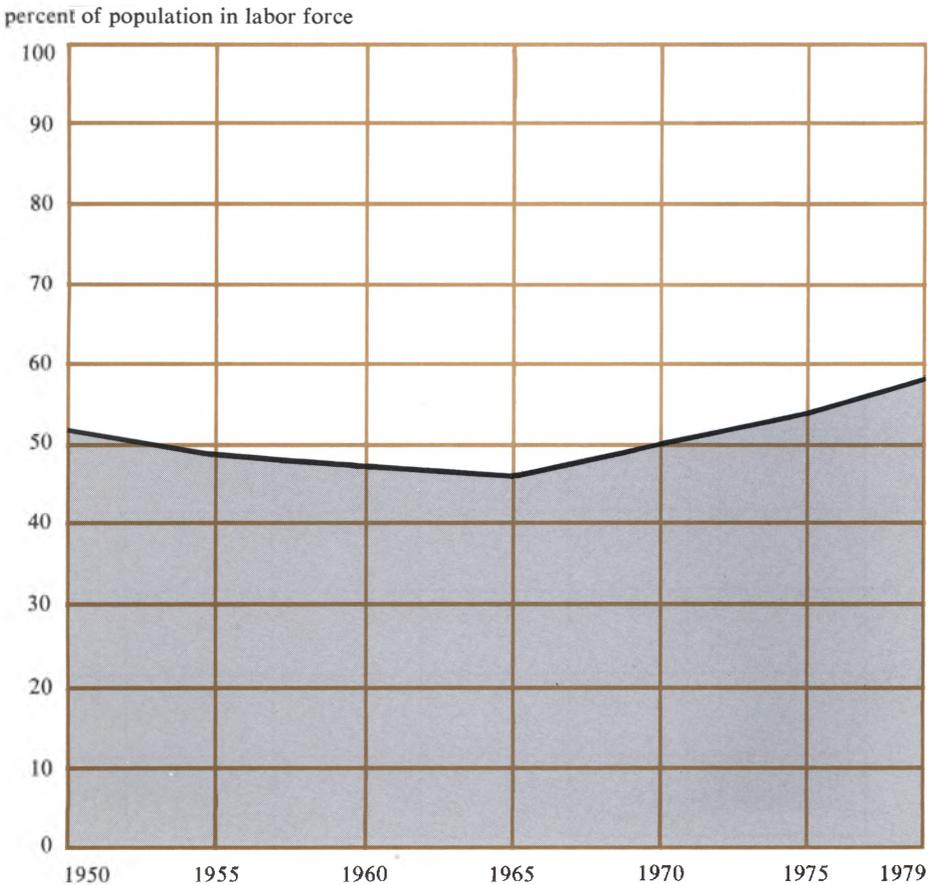


**CHART 4.**

**Teenagers as a Percent of the Total Civilian Labor Force, Actual and Projected.**

**1950-90.**

*Teenagers are expected to account for a significantly smaller proportion of the labor force in 1990 than they accounted for in 1979.*



**CHART 5.**

**Teenage Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates.**

**1950-79.**

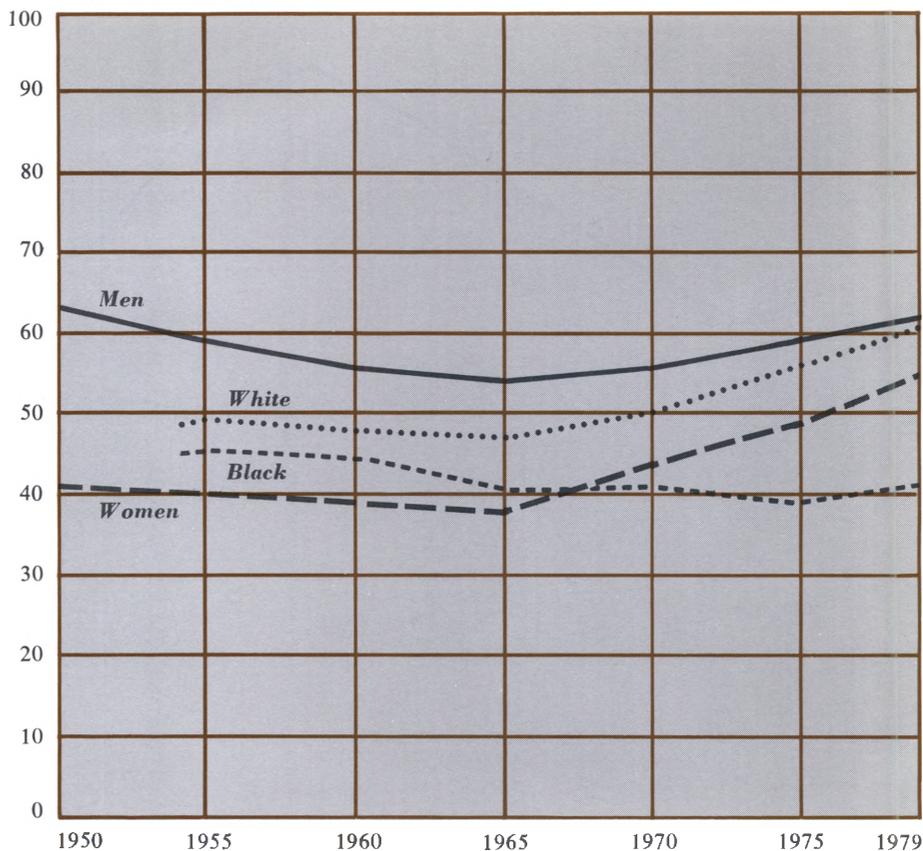
*Over the last decade, the teenage participation rate has risen steadily.*

### CHART 6.

#### Teenage Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex and Race. 1950-79.

*Participation rates of white teenagers and teenage women have risen continuously since the mid-1960's, but the rate for black youth has trended downward.*

percent of population in labor force

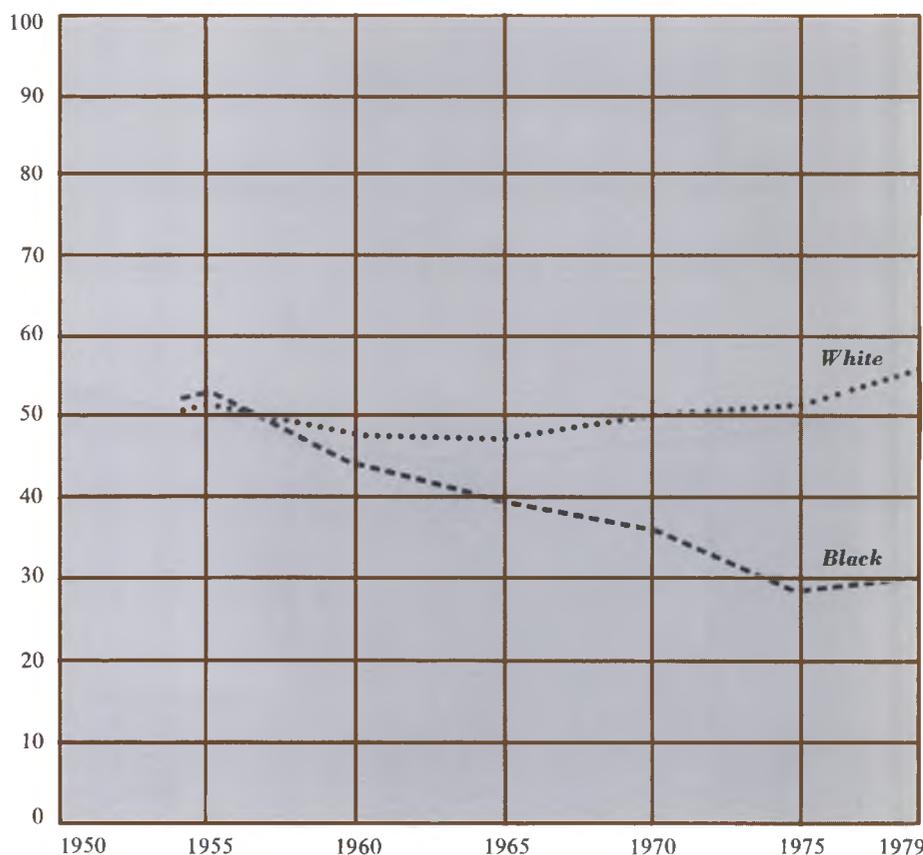


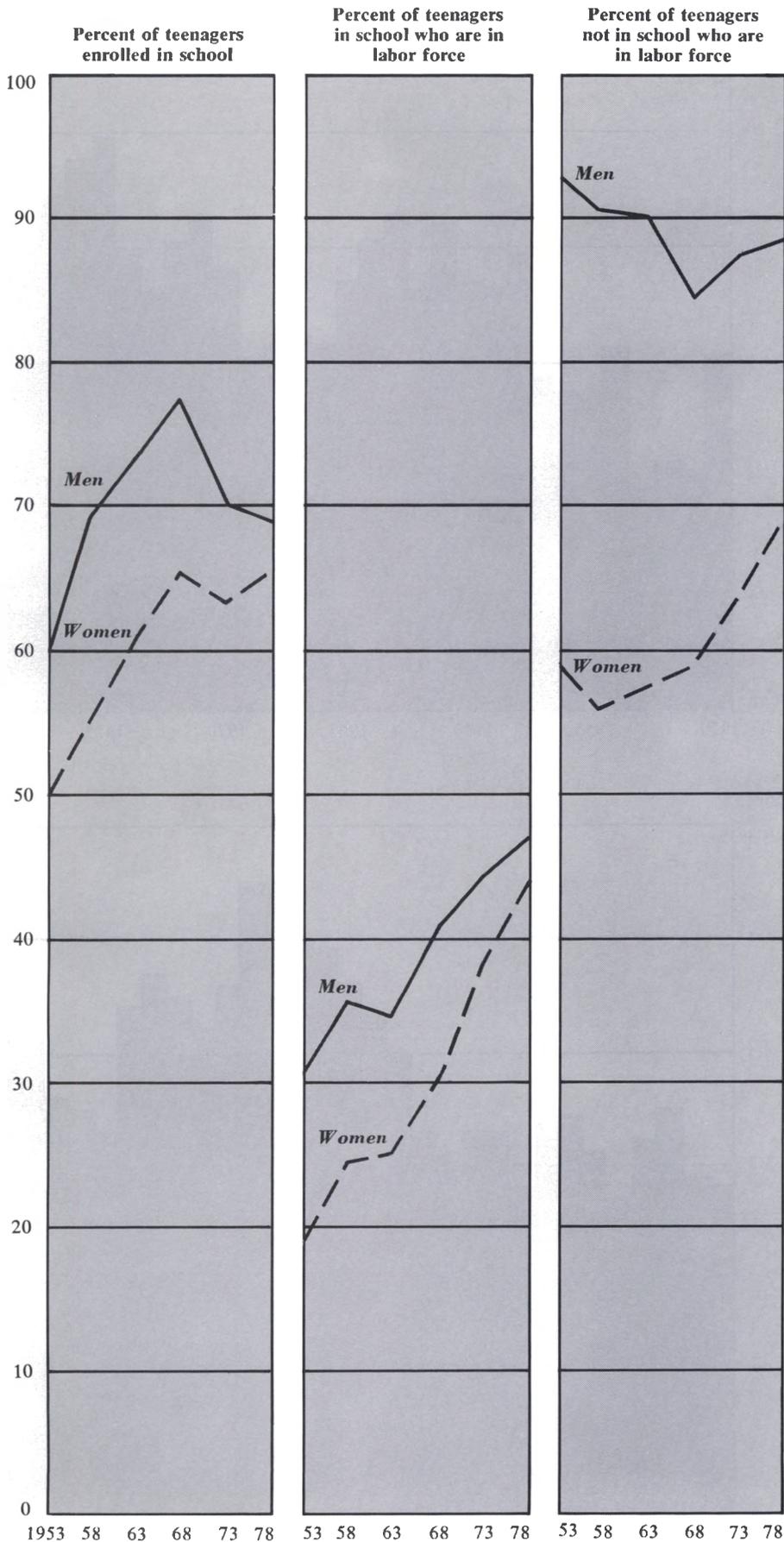
### CHART 7.

#### Employment-Population Ratios of Teenage Men by Race. 1954-79.

*The proportion of the black male teenage population that is employed has been declining; at the same time, the ratio for young white men has been rising.*

percent of population employed



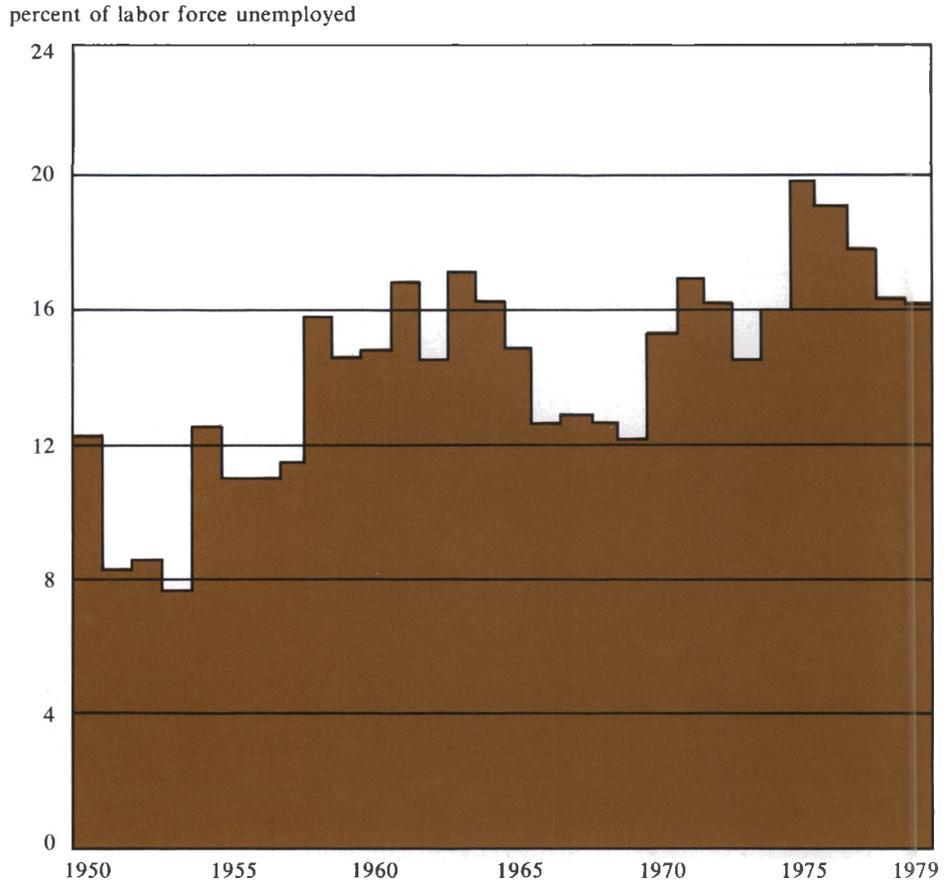


**CHART 8.**  
**Teenage Population by School Enrollment, Labor Force Status, and Sex.**  
**October, 1953-78.**

*There has been a marked trend toward labor market participation by teenagers enrolled in school, particularly among young women.*

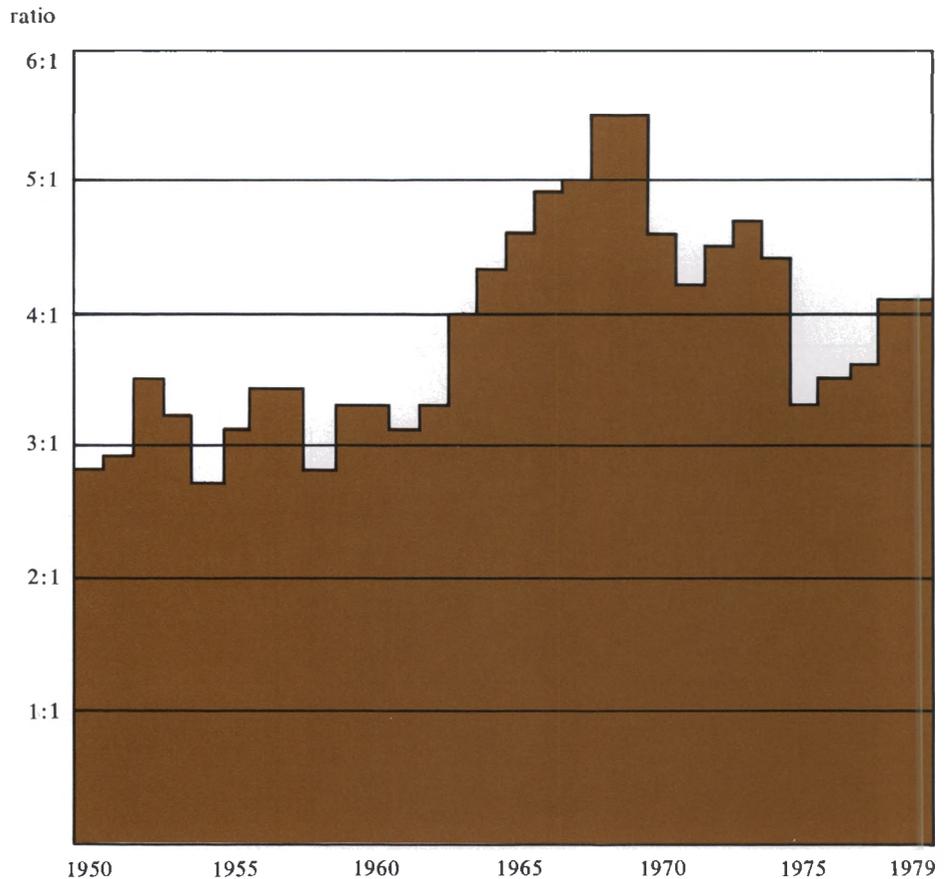
**CHART 9.**  
**Teenage Unemployment Rates.**  
**1950-79.**

*The jobless rate for teenagers has been persistently high since the 1960's; it reached a peak of 20 percent during the 1973-75 recession.*

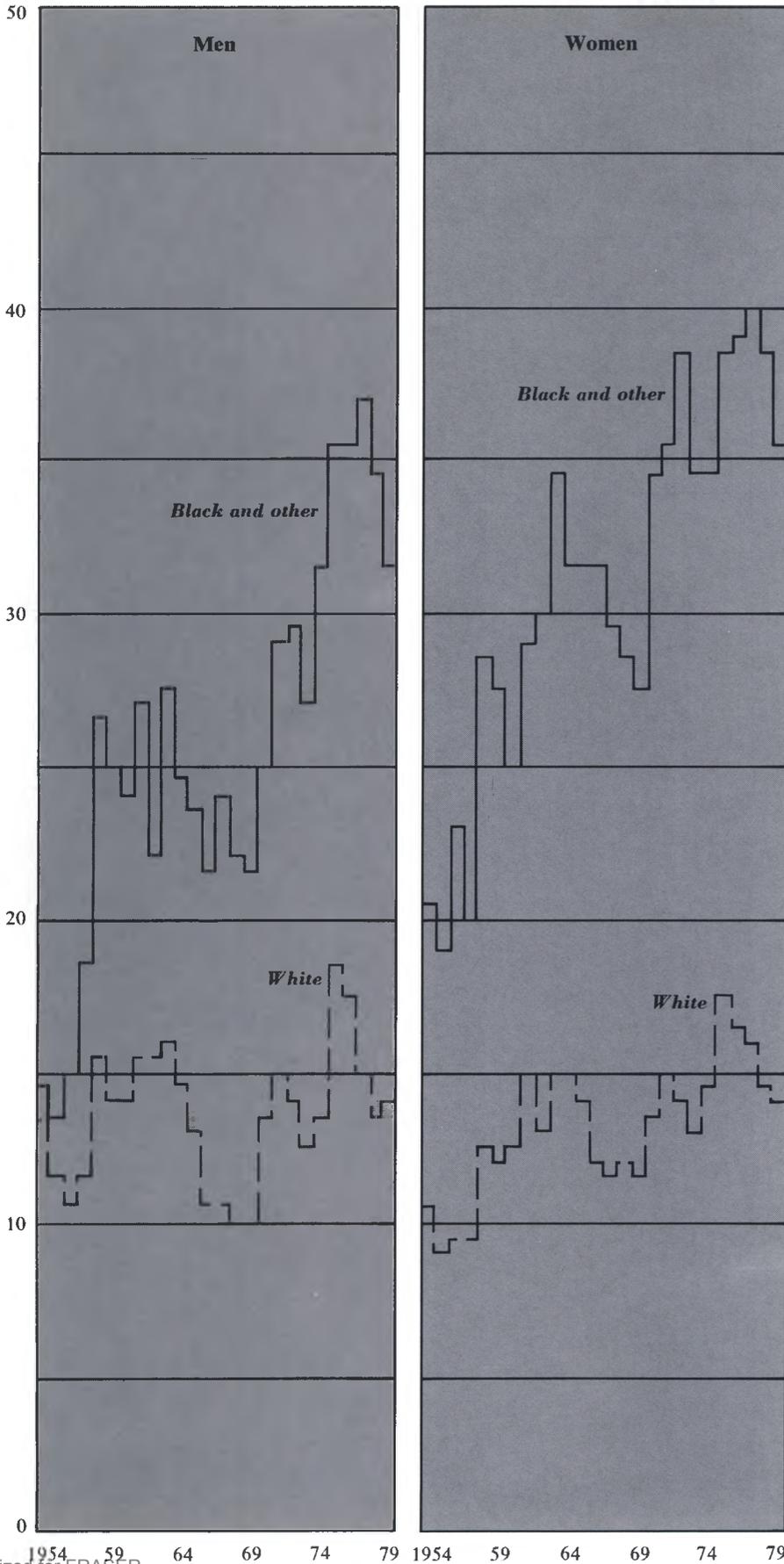


**CHART 10.**  
**Ratios of Teenage to Adult Unemployment Rates.**  
**1950-79.**

*The teenage unemployment rate has been more than triple the rate for adult workers for most of the last 25 years. The disparity was especially great in the late 1960's.*



percent of civilian labor force unemployed



**CHART 11.**

**Teenage Unemployment Rates by Sex and Race. 1954-79.**

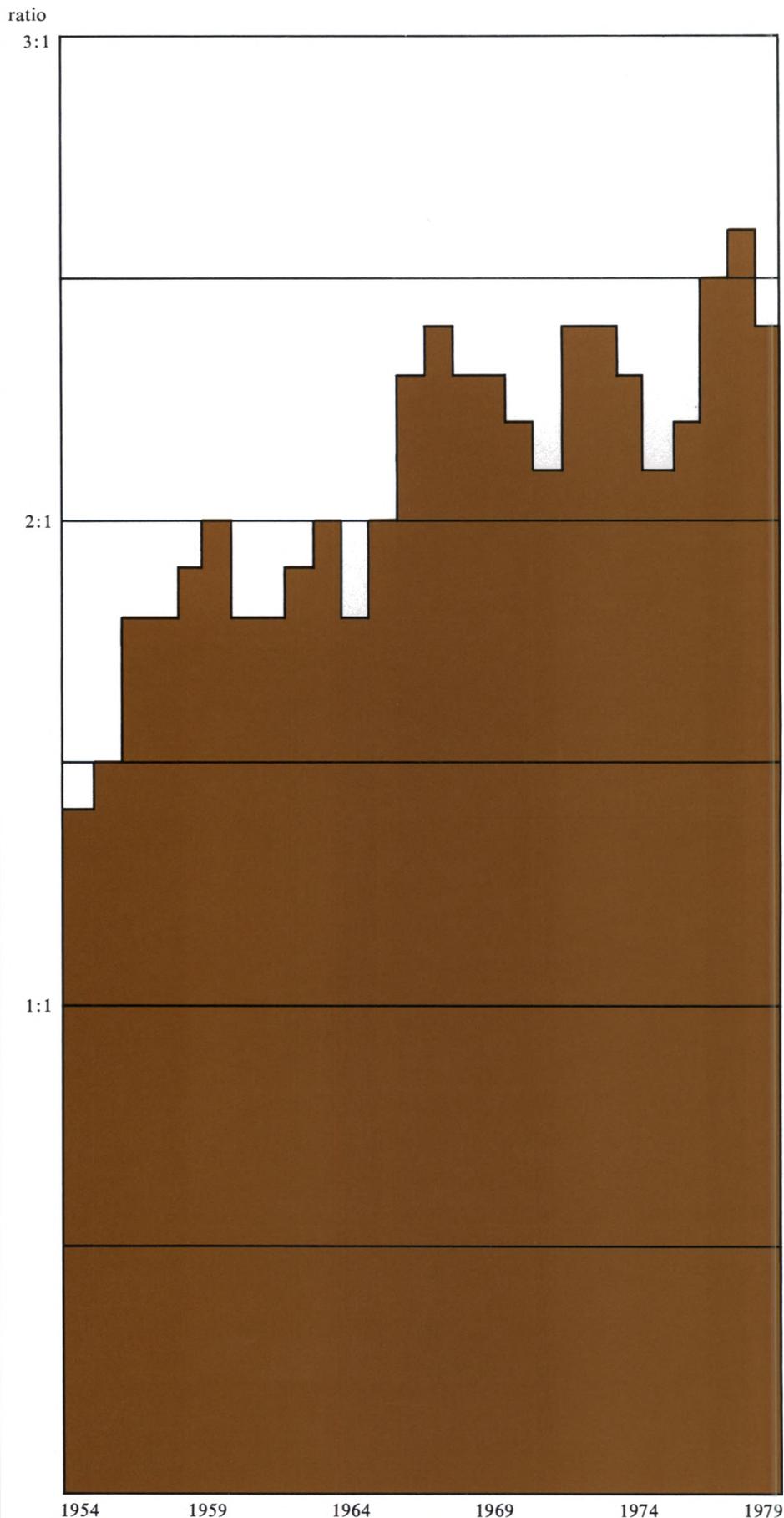
*Black and other minority teenagers have experienced higher unemployment rates than their white counterparts.*

**CHART 12.**

**Ratios of Black and Other Teenage to White Teenage Unemployment Rates.**

**1954-79.**

*The ratio of black and other minority teenage unemployment to white teenage unemployment increased through the late 1950's and early 1960's and again in the mid-to late 1970's*



Labor force participation no longer typically begins upon the completion of school. Increasingly, young people ease into the labor market by combining work with school. During October 1978, about 67 percent of all teenagers 16 to 19 years old were enrolled in school. Of these, 44 percent of the female students and 47 percent of the male students were in the labor force. However, while the participation rate for white students averaged 49 percent, that for black students was only about one-half this figure at 26 percent (table 2).

For teenagers not enrolled in school, the pattern is vastly different—about 86 percent of the high school graduates and 66 percent of the dropouts are in the labor force. As with students, blacks not enrolled in school have considerably lower rates of participation than their white counterparts.

Not only are students less likely than out-of-school youth to be in the labor force, but, when they are working, the characteristics of their jobs, on average, are likely to be quite different because students are much more likely to work only part time. Slightly less than one-tenth of those teenagers enrolled in school work full time, compared with about two-thirds of those in the labor force not attending school.

When comparing occupational distributions of students and nonstudents, it can be seen that students are more likely to be in service work and less likely to hold a blue-collar job than their counterparts who are out of school. There are also noticeable differences in the industries in which teenagers are employed when school enrollment status is taken into account. For example, manufacturing accounts for about 30 percent of male nonstudent employment, compared with 7 percent for male youth still in school. Among young women in school, 90 percent were employed in either wholesale and retail trade or service and finance; about 70 percent

of the out-of-school women had such employment.

A significant aspect of the youth labor market is the summer influx of students. Each summer, the 16- to 21-year-old labor force expands sharply, as large numbers of youth search for summer jobs and high school and college graduates, many of whom were not in the labor force while attending school, enter the job market. Summer employment provides work experience—as well as income—for many students who did not work while at school (54.3 percent) and provides continuing experience for student workers, and thus contributes to the adjustment of these youth in the adult labor market.

During 1979, the number of 16- to 21-year-olds in the labor force in July, the peak month, was 3.6 million more than in April, an increase of 25 percent. About 75 percent of all youths were in the labor force in the summer compared with about 60 percent in April (table 3).

Traditionally, labor market activity is measured at a specific time, that is, in a single survey week for each month of the year. It is also possible, however, to obtain data on the work experience of a person over an entire calendar year. These data reveal that the proportion of youths with some work experience during the year is substantially higher than that for the average of all months of the year. In 1978, for example, approximately 10.8 million teenagers worked at some time during the year, compared with an average of only 8.0 million who were working at any given time. Likewise, the proportion of teenagers who worked or looked for work during 1978 was 66 percent, considerably higher than the monthly average of 58 percent. Clearly, these numbers reflect what we all know, that there is much greater participation in the summer than in the 9 school-year months.

The percentage of the teenage population that worked in 1978 varied

## II. Recent Developments

markedly by race and sex. White youth were much more likely than blacks to have worked during the year (70 percent versus 42 percent). And teenage men were more likely to have been employed during the year than their female counterparts.

Teenage men are more likely than their female counterparts to work full time. During 1979 about three-fifths of the men but only half the women were on full-time schedules or were working part time because they could not find a full-time position.

Teenagers also differ in their family status and consequent financial needs. For most teenagers, finding employment is not an economic necessity since almost three-fourths of all teenagers live in 2-parent families; only about 12 percent have no parental attachment. On the other hand, about one-half of all black teenagers reside in 1-parent families or are living apart from their parents; for these youth, finding a job can be crucially important.

The area of residence of teenagers may also create variations in their labor force experience. More teenagers live in the suburbs (6.6 million in 1979) than in the central cities or nonmetropolitan areas (4.4 million and 5.3 million, respectively). In marked contrast to the total number, more than one-half of the 2.2 million black youth lived in the central cities in 1979, while less than one-fifth lived in the suburbs, and the balance, in nonmetropolitan areas (table 4). In each of these locations, however, teenagers constituted roughly 10 percent of the overall labor force. Youth in the central cities exhibited some-

what lower participation in the labor force than those in suburban and nonmetropolitan areas, and correspondingly higher unemployment rates.

Most labor force statistics do not reflect the important role of the military services in providing jobs for young persons. (Current employment and unemployment statistics are based on the civilian labor force, which excludes the Armed Forces). During 1979, 6.3 percent of all blacks in the labor force were in the Armed Forces, more than double the percentage of all whites (2.7 percent) who went into the military services. Over 90 percent of the teenagers in the services are male; however, this proportion is expected to decline somewhat over the next several years as the Armed Forces continue to open up more opportunities for women. As of 1979, teenagers accounted for 14.5 percent of the total Armed Forces, while 20- to 24-year-olds made up another 39 percent.

Black teenagers are somewhat more likely to be in the military services than their white counterparts; in 1979, the Armed Forces participation rate of black teens was 2.7 percent versus 1.6 percent for whites. In the past, white teenagers have had higher participation rates in the Armed Forces than blacks, but beginning in 1973, the relationship has reversed and the gap has widened, largely as a result of the return to an all-volunteer army.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. L. Cooper, "Youth Labor Markets and the Military," *Conference Report on Youth Unemployment: Its Measurement and Meaning* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1978), pp. 215-48.

numbers in thousands

School Enrollment and Employment Status	Total	Men	Women	White	Black	Hispanic
Enrolled in school	11,084	5,658	5,426	9,296	1,558	595
Civilian labor force	5,066	2,670	2,396	4,576	408	242
Participation rate	45.7	47.2	44.2	49.2	26.2	40.7
Employed	4,289	2,245	2,044	3,970	256	197
Unemployed	775	425	350	604	151	45
Unemployment rate	15.3	15.9	14.6	13.2	37.0	18.6
Not in the labor force	6,018	2,988	3,030	4,720	1,150	353
Not enrolled in school	5,353	2,514	2,839	4,610	667	394
Civilian labor force	4,200	2,228	1,972	3,729	425	278
Participation rate	78.5	88.6	69.5	80.9	62.8	70.6
Employed	3,545	1,912	1,634	3,231	283	225
Unemployed	653	315	339	498	142	54
Unemployment rate	15.5	14.1	17.2	13.4	33.4	19.4
Not in the labor force	1,153	286	867	881	252	116

numbers in thousands

Sex and Race	Employment Status	April 1979	July 1979
<b>Total</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	24,496	24,486
	Civilian labor force	14,645	18,266
	Participation rate	59.8	74.6
	Employed	12,745	15,812
	Unemployed	1,900	2,454
	Unemployment rate	13.0	13.4
	Not in the labor force	9,851	6,220
<b>Men</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	12,078	12,081
	Civilian labor force	7,763	9,885
	Participation rate	64.3	81.8
	Employed	6,779	8,612
	Unemployed	985	1,273
	Unemployment rate	12.7	12.9
	Not in the labor force	43.5	2,196
<b>Women</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	12,418	12,405
	Civilian labor force	6,882	8,381
	Participation rate	55.4	67.6
	Employed	5,966	7,201
	Unemployed	916	1,181
	Unemployment rate	13.3	14.1
	Not in the labor force	5,536	4,024
<b>White</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	20,785	20,764
	Civilian labor force	12,942	16,007
	Participation rate	62.3	77.1
	Employed	11,524	14,187
	Unemployed	1,418	1,820
	Unemployment rate	11.0	11.4
	Not in the labor force	7,842	4,757
<b>Black and other</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	3,712	3,722
	Civilian labor force	1,703	2,259
	Participation rate	45.9	60.7
	Employed	1,221	1,625
	Unemployed	482	634
	Unemployment rate	28.3	28.1
	Not in the labor force	2,009	1,463

**TABLE 2.**

**Employment Status of the Teenage Population by School Enrollment, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, October 1978.**

**TABLE 3.**

**Employment Status of Persons 16-21 Years Old by Sex and Race, April and July, 1979.**

TABLE 4.

**Employment Status of the Teenage Population by Area of Residence, Race, and Hispanic Origin.**

1979 Annual Averages.

numbers in thousands

Employment Status, Race, and Hispanic Origin	Central City	Suburbs	Non- metropolitan Area
<b>Total</b>			
Civilian noninstitutional population	4,413	6,642	5,323
Civilian labor force	2,358	4,080	3,073
Participation rate	53.4	61.4	57.7
Employed	1,889	3,499	2,595
Unemployed	469	581	477
Unemployment rate	19.9	14.2	15.5
Not in the labor force	2,055	2,562	2,250
<b>White</b>			
Civilian noninstitutional population	3,058	6,085	4,698
Civilian labor force	1,833	3,834	2,809
Participation rate	59.9	63.0	59.8
Employed	1,562	3,321	2,411
Unemployed	271	513	398
Unemployment rate	14.8	13.4	14.2
Not in the labor force	1,225	2,251	1,889
<b>Black</b>			
Civilian noninstitutional population	1,237	439	545
Civilian labor force	470	189	226
Participation rate	38.0	43.1	41.5
Employed	283	128	153
Unemployed	189	61	74
Unemployment rate	40.2	32.3	32.7
Not in the labor force	766	250	319
<b>Hispanic</b>			
Civilian noninstitutional population	486	370	184
Civilian labor force	225	203	100
Participation rate	46.3	54.9	53.8
Employed	180	166	82
Unemployed	46	37	18
Unemployment rate	20.4	18.2	18.2
Not in the labor force	260	167	85

numbers in thousands

School Enrollment and Employment Status	Total	Men	Women	White	Black	Hispanic
Enrolled in school	11,084	5,658	5,426	9,296	1,558	595
Civilian labor force	5,066	2,670	2,396	4,576	408	242
Participation rate	45.7	47.2	44.2	49.2	26.2	40.7
Employed	4,289	2,245	2,044	3,970	256	197
Unemployed	775	425	350	604	151	45
Unemployment rate	15.3	15.9	14.6	13.2	37.0	18.6
Not in the labor force	6,018	2,988	3,030	4,720	1,150	353
Not enrolled in school	5,353	2,514	2,839	4,610	667	394
Civilian labor force	4,200	2,228	1,972	3,729	425	278
Participation rate	78.5	88.6	69.5	80.9	62.8	70.6
Employed	3,545	1,912	1,634	3,231	283	225
Unemployed	653	315	339	498	142	54
Unemployment rate	15.5	14.1	17.2	13.4	33.4	19.4
Not in the labor force	1,153	286	867	881	252	116

numbers in thousands

Sex and Race	Employment Status	April 1979	July 1979
<b>Total</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	24,496	24,486
	Civilian labor force	14,645	18,266
	Participation rate	59.8	74.6
	Employed	12,745	15,812
	Unemployed	1,900	2,454
	Unemployment rate	13.0	13.4
	Not in the labor force	9,851	6,220
<b>Men</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	12,078	12,081
	Civilian labor force	7,763	9,885
	Participation rate	64.3	81.8
	Employed	6,779	8,612
	Unemployed	985	1,273
	Unemployment rate	12.7	12.9
	Not in the labor force	43.5	2,196
<b>Women</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	12,418	12,405
	Civilian labor force	6,882	8,381
	Participation rate	55.4	67.6
	Employed	5,966	7,201
	Unemployed	916	1,181
	Unemployment rate	13.3	14.1
	Not in the labor force	5,536	4,024
<b>White</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	20,785	20,764
	Civilian labor force	12,942	16,007
	Participation rate	62.3	77.1
	Employed	11,524	14,187
	Unemployed	1,418	1,820
	Unemployment rate	11.0	11.4
	Not in the labor force	7,842	4,757
<b>Black and other</b>	Civilian noninstitutional population	3,712	3,722
	Civilian labor force	1,703	2,259
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**TABLE 3.**

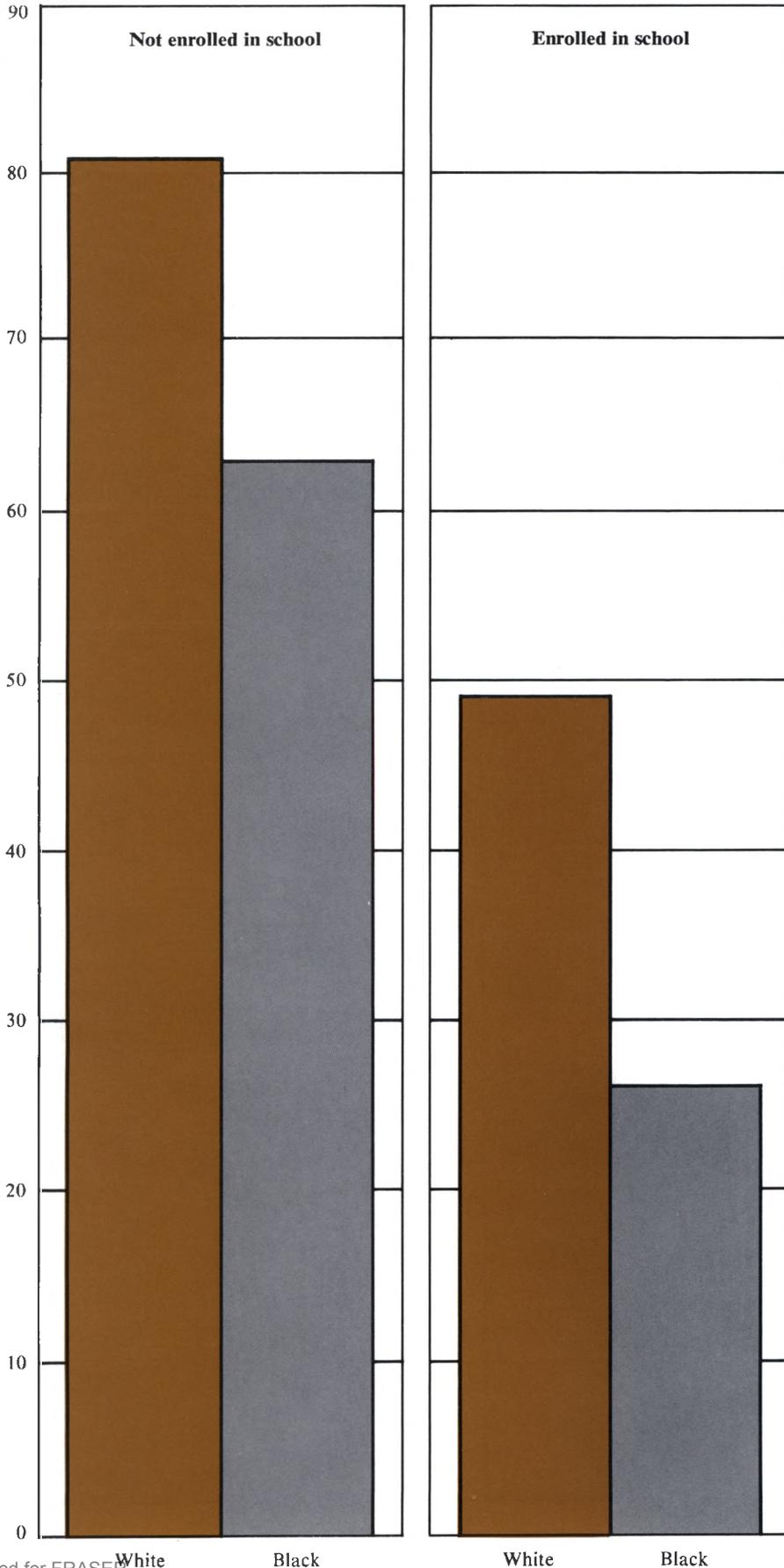
**Employment Status of Persons 16-21 Years Old by Sex and Race. April and July, 1979.**

**TABLE 4.****Employment Status of the Teenage Population by Area of Residence, Race, and Hispanic Origin.****1979 Annual Averages.**

numbers in thousands

<b>Employment Status, Race, and Hispanic Origin</b>	<b>Central City</b>	<b>Suburbs</b>	<b>Non- metropolitan Area</b>
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Not in the labor force	766	250	319
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Participation rate	46.3	54.9	53.8
Employed	180	166	82
Unemployed	46	37	18
Unemployment rate	20.4	18.2	18.2
Not in the labor force	260	167	85

percent of population in labor force



**CHART 13.**

**Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates of Teenagers by School Enrollment Status and Race.**

**October 1978.**

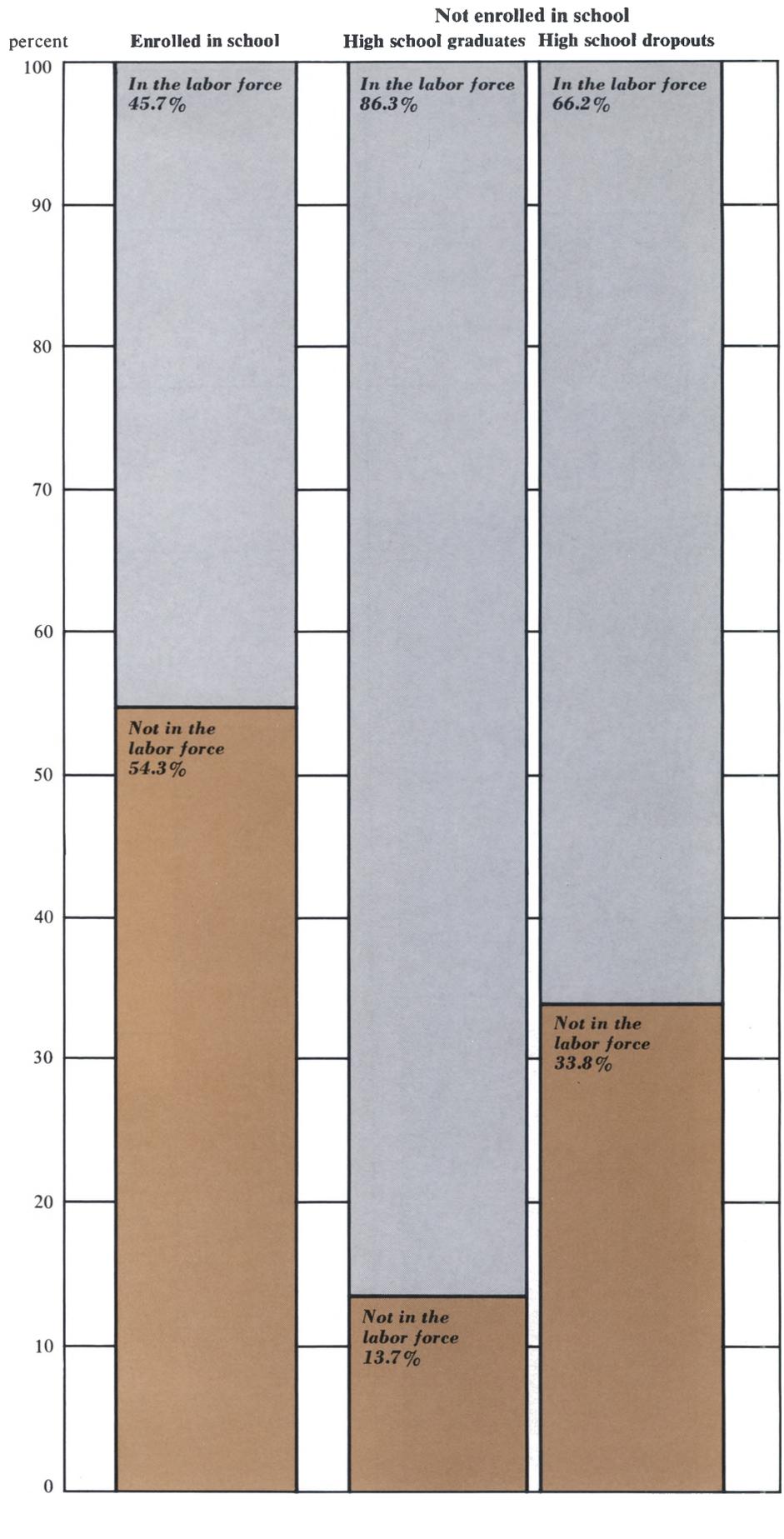
*Whether they are in school or not, black teenagers have considerably lower rates of labor force participation than white teenagers.*

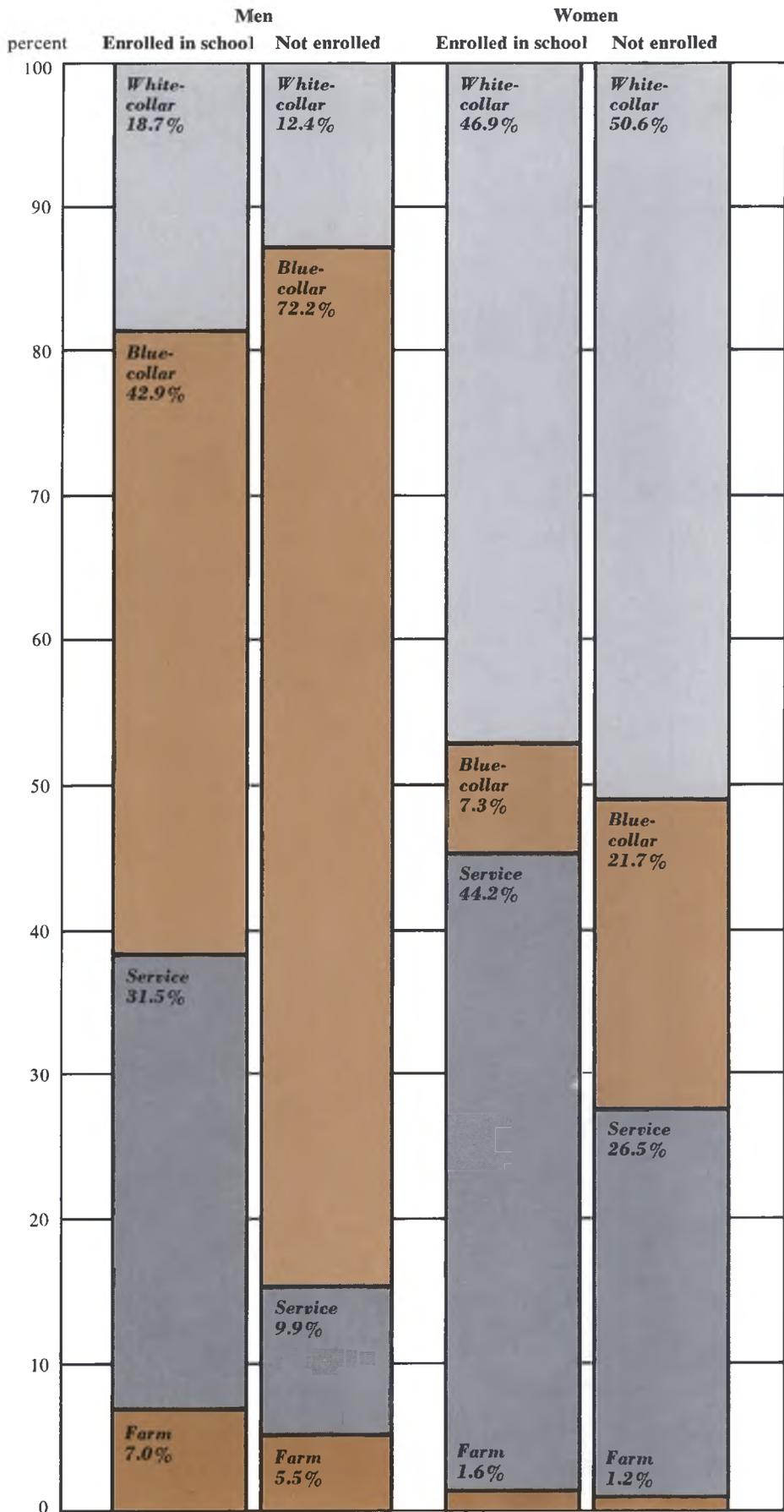
**CHART 14.**

**Teenage Employment Status by School Enrollment.**

**October 1978.**

*Among teenagers not enrolled in school, 86 percent of the high school graduates, but only 66 percent of the dropouts, were in the labor force in October 1978.*





**CHART 15.**

**Employed Teenagers by Occupation, School Enrollment Status, and Sex. October 1978.**

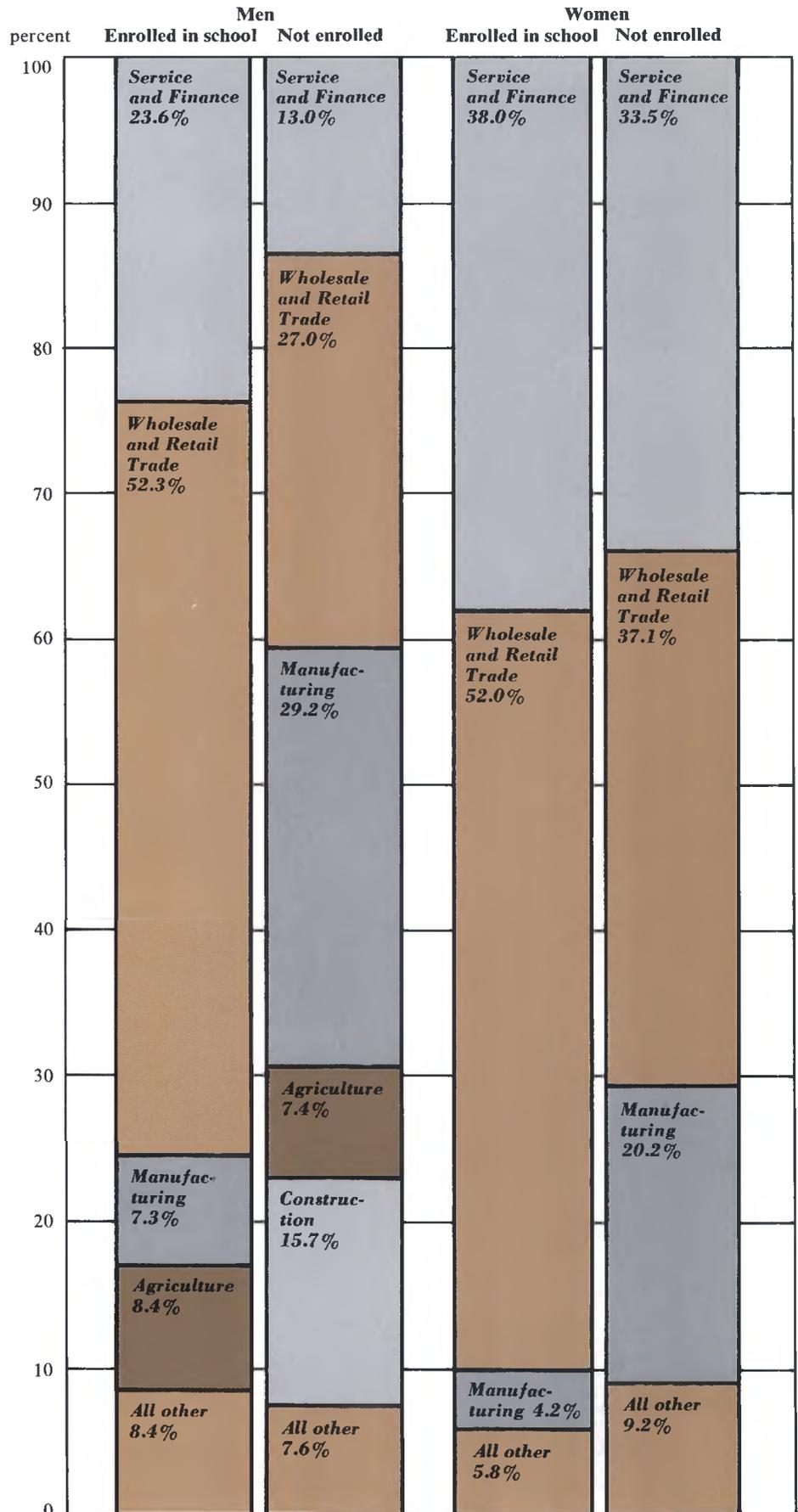
*Students are more likely to be in service work and less likely to hold a blue-collar job than teenagers who are out of school.*

**CHART 16.**

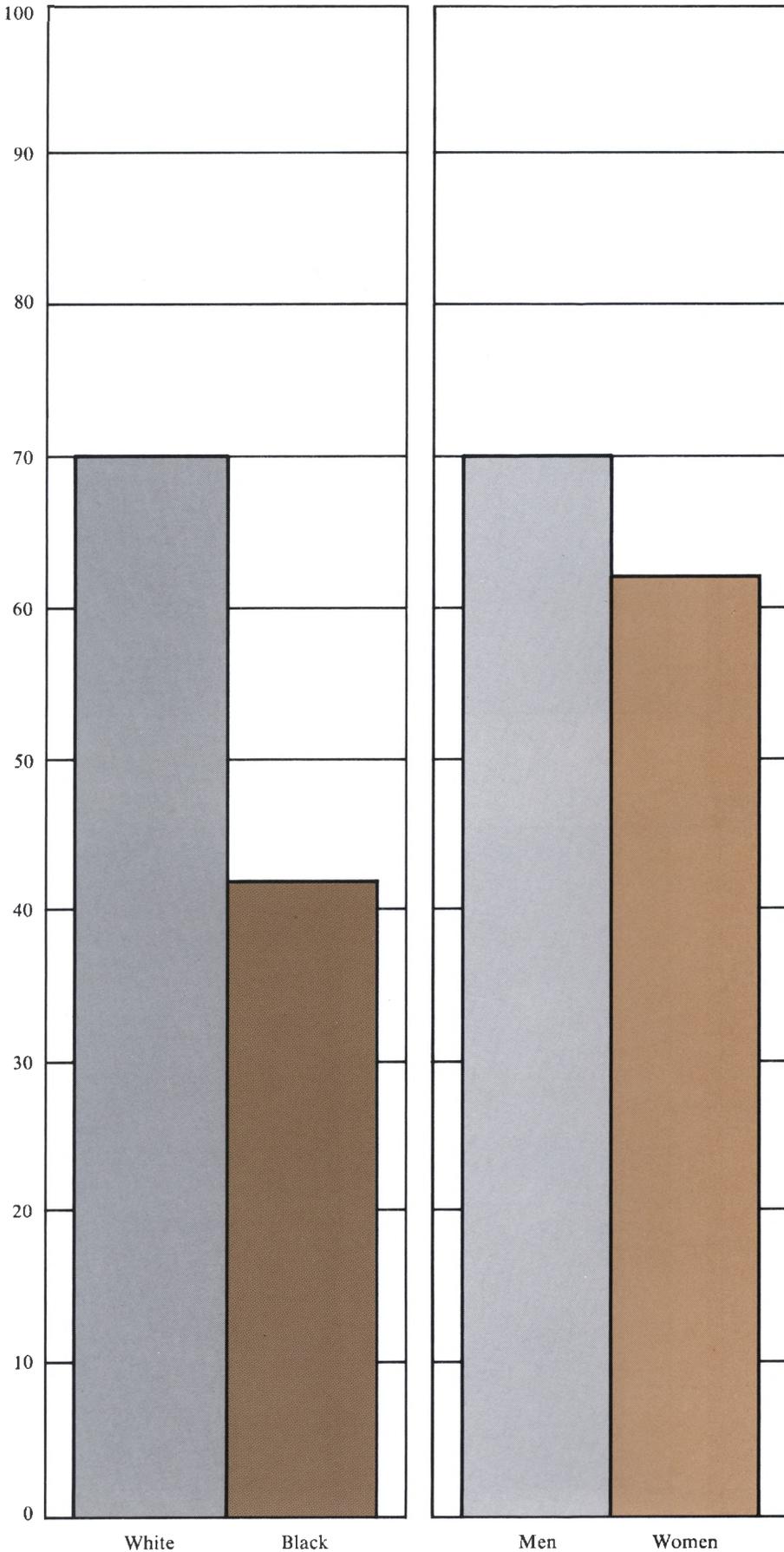
**Employed Teenagers by Industry, School Enrollment Status, and Sex.**

**October 1978.**

*The jobs of teenagers in school—both men and women—are concentrated in the trade sector; those out of school are more evenly dispersed throughout all industry sectors.*



percent



**CHART 17.**

**Percent of Teenage Population with Work Experience during 1978 by Race and Sex.**

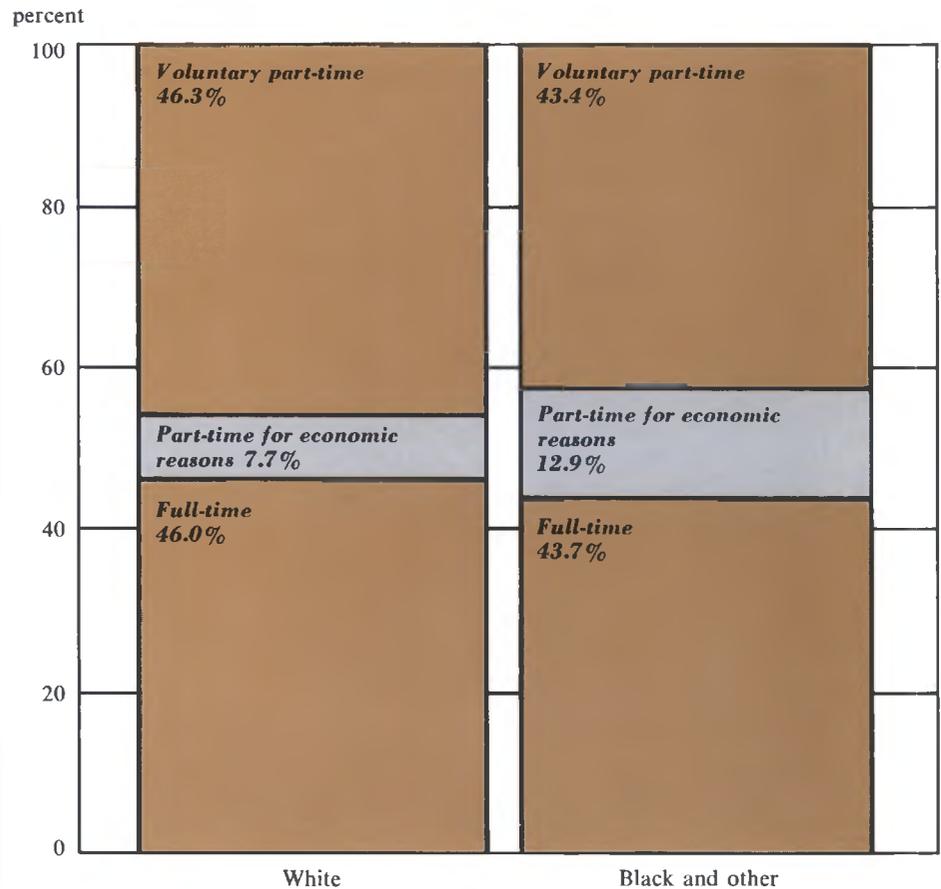
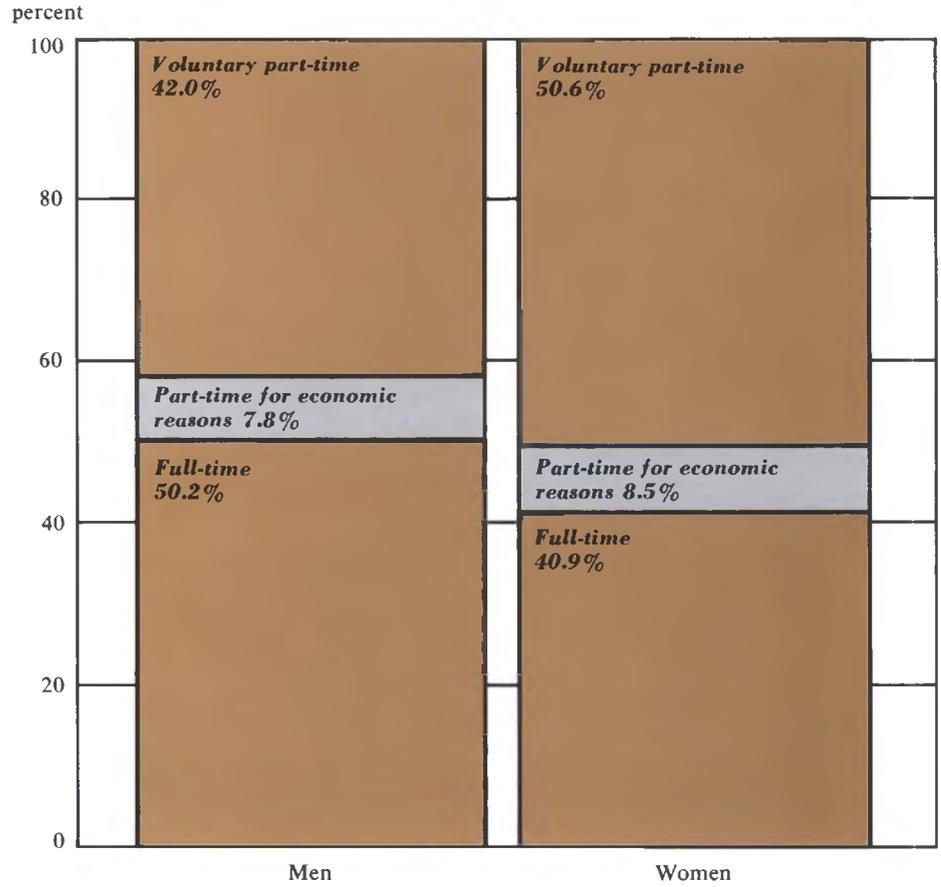
*White youth are much more likely than blacks to have a job, and teenage men are more likely than women to have one.*

**CHART 18.**

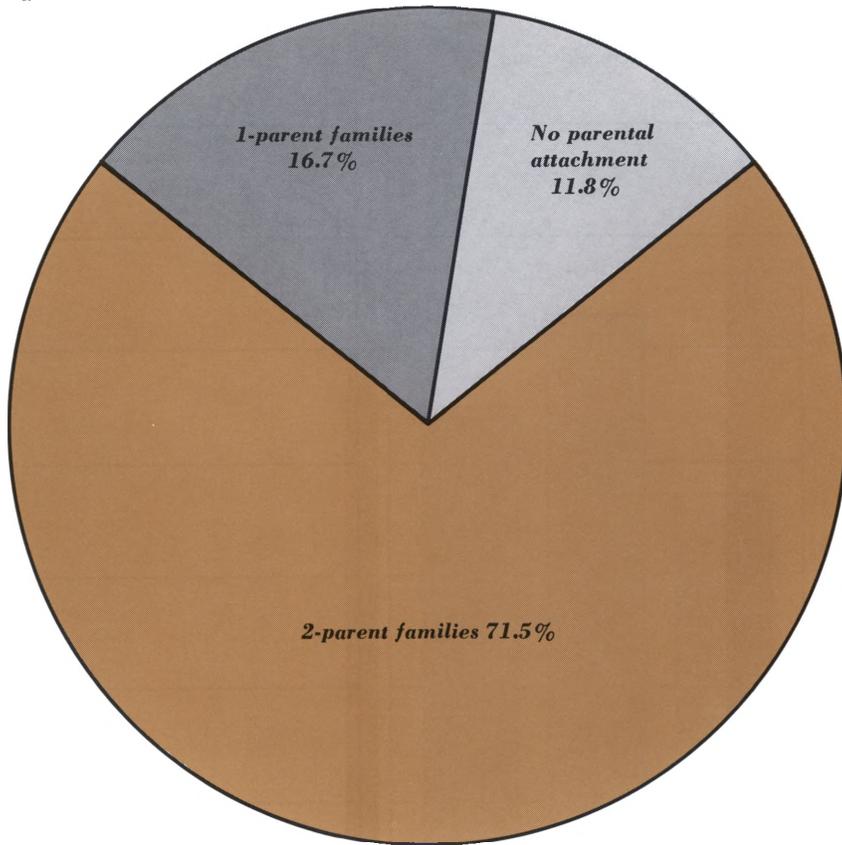
**Employed Teenagers by Full or Part-Time Status, Sex, and Race.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

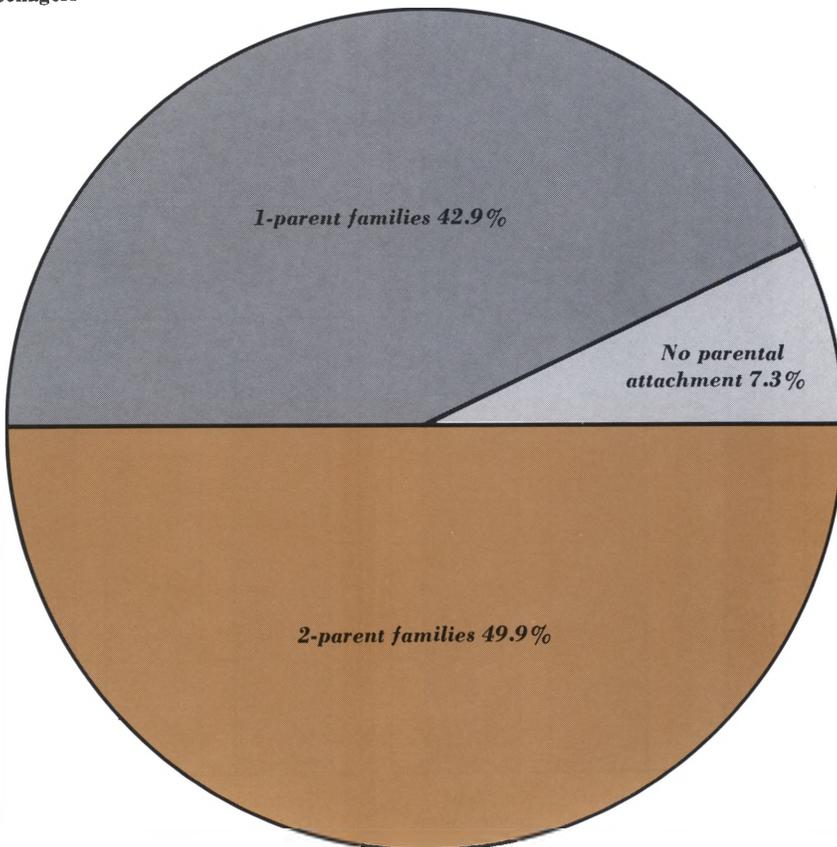
*Teenage men are more likely than teenage women to work full time. Also, more black than white teenagers must settle for a part-time position although they desire a full-time job.*



All teenagers



Black teenagers



**CHART 19.**

**Family Status of Teenagers.  
1979 Annual Averages.**

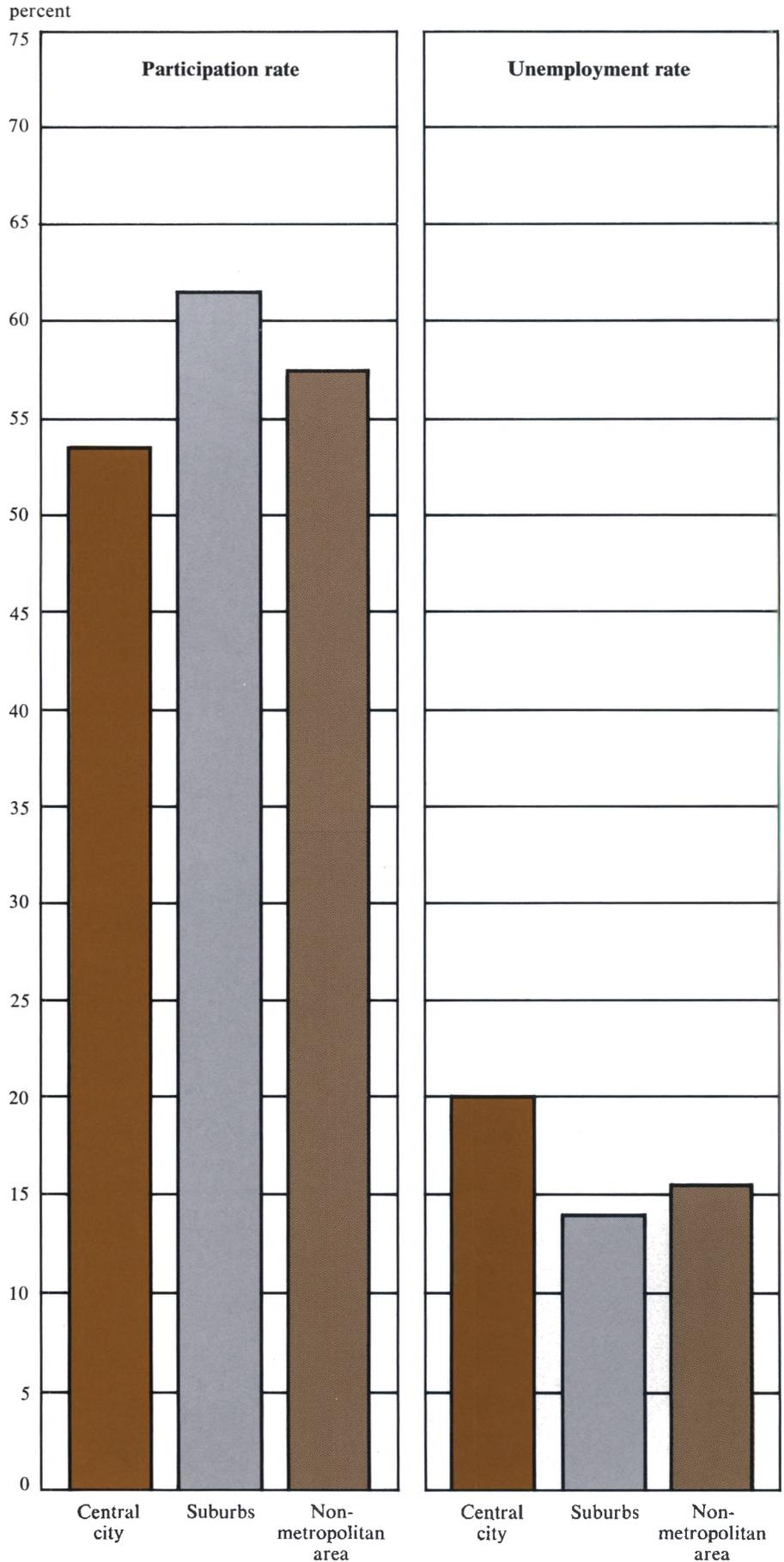
*One-half of black teenagers, compared with about one-quarter of all teenagers, reside in 1-parent families or are living apart from their parents.*

**CHART 20.**

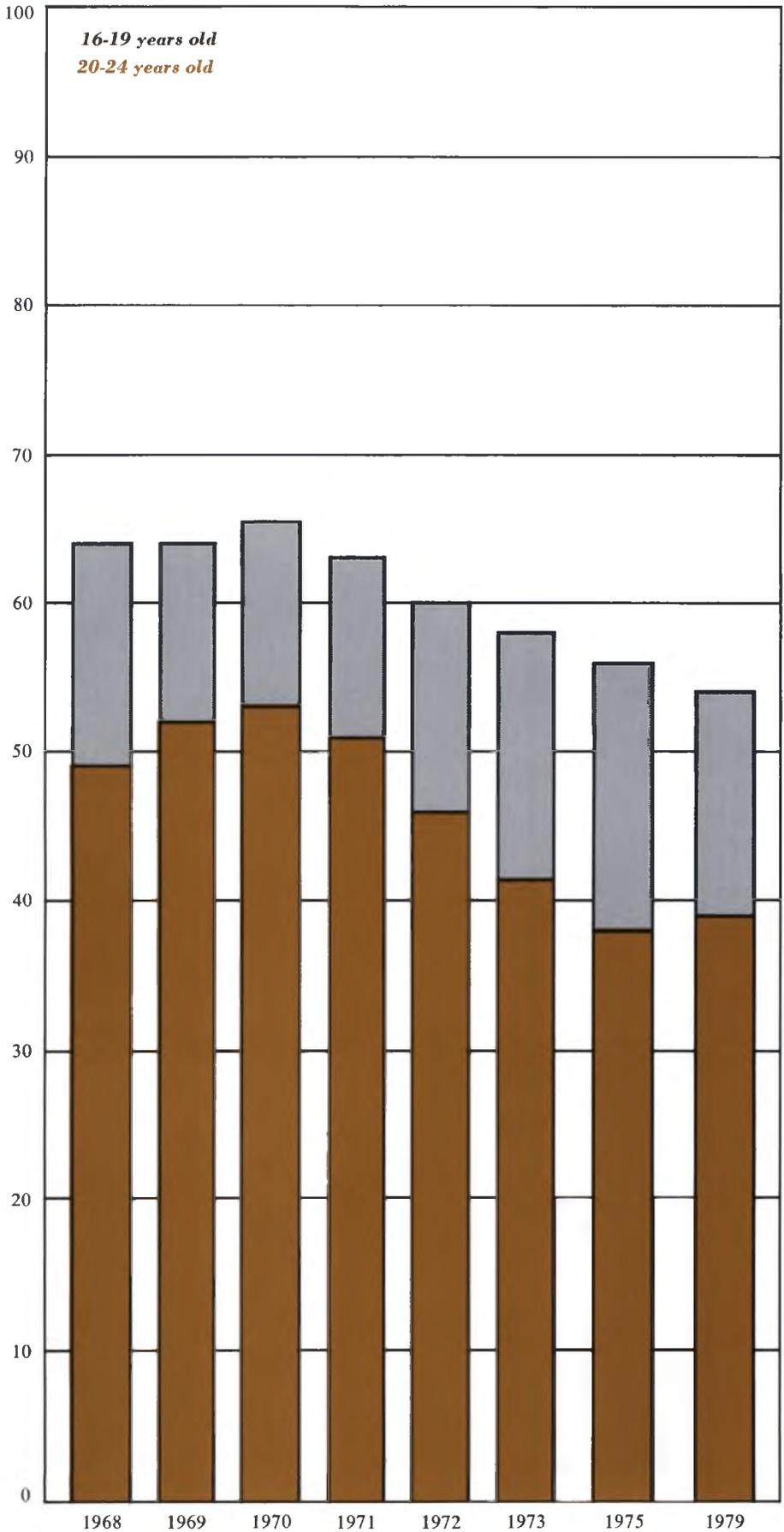
**Teenage Civilian Labor Force  
Participation Rates and  
Unemployment Rates by Area of  
Residence.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

*Youth in the central cities exhibit  
somewhat lower participation in the  
labor force and higher unemployment  
rates than those in suburban and  
metropolitan areas.*



percent of Armed Forces



**CHART 21.**

**Youth in the Armed Forces as a Percent of Total Armed Forces. Selected Years, 1968-79.**

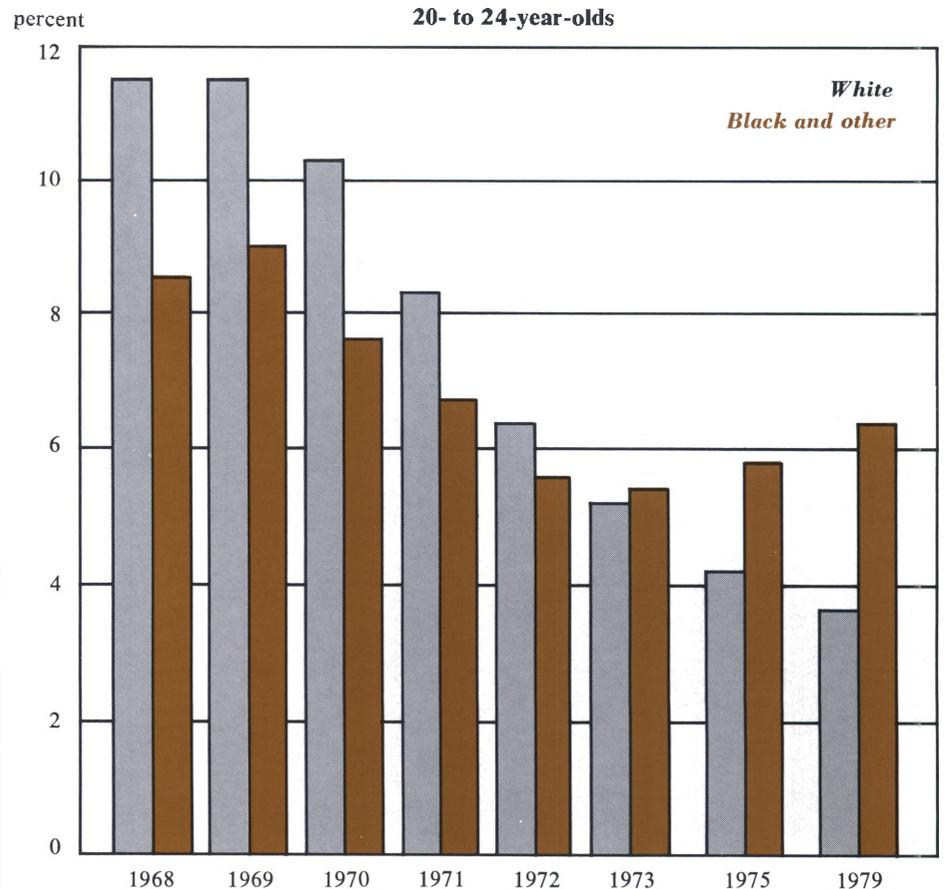
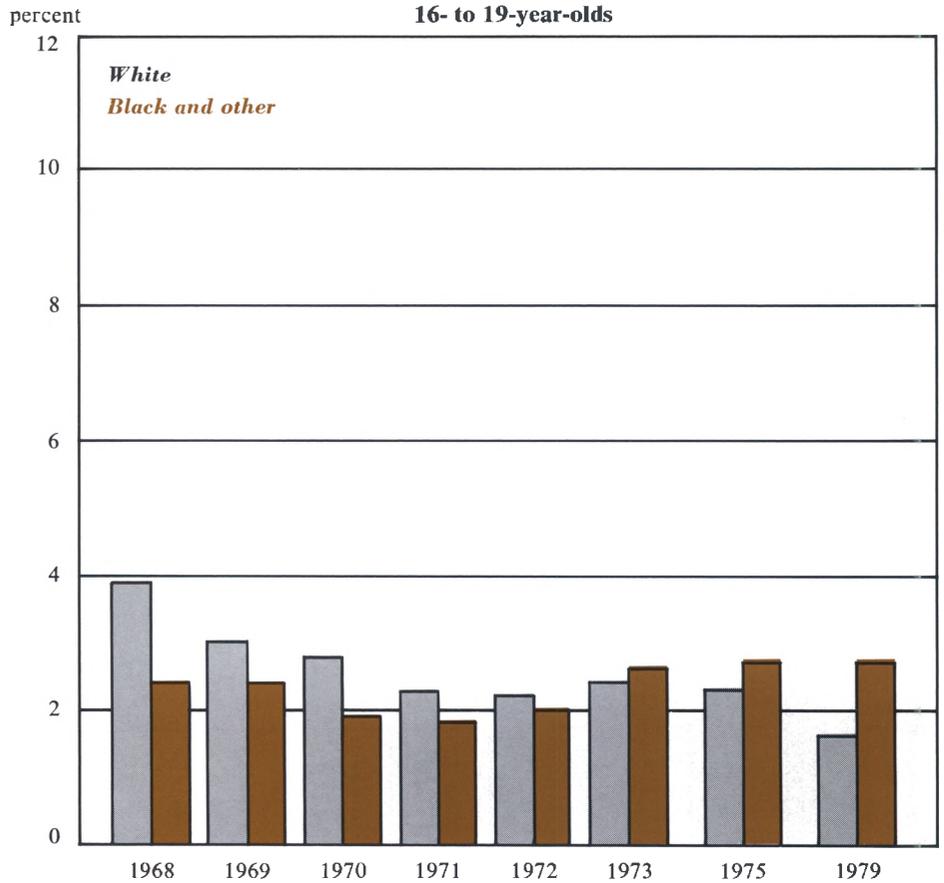
*Teenagers accounted for 15 percent of the Armed Forces in 1979.*

**CHART 22.**

**Youth Armed Forces Participation Rates by Race.**

**Selected Years, 1968-79.**

*In the past, white teenagers have had a higher participation rate in the Armed Forces than blacks, but since 1973 the relationship has reversed.*



The incidence of unemployment is traditionally highest among the youngest members of the labor force (table 5). On the average in 1979, 1.5 million teenagers were unable to find jobs, and their unemployment rate of 16 percent was over four times that for persons 25 years and over. Teenagers accounted for about one-tenth of the Nation's labor force in 1979 but over one-fourth of the unemployed.

The high unemployment rates for youth are attributable to many factors, including lack of work experience, inadequate entry skills, lack of or inadequate job counseling, the intermittent attachment of students and other youth to the labor force, and, as noted earlier, the influx of the maturing postwar baby-boom generation into the labor force causing additional competition for jobs. Also, part of youth unemployment is attributable to the fact that, in general, primary firms, basically those in the goods-producing industries, do not want to hire young workers under any circumstances. The source of this discrimination can probably be traced to the turn of the century when the combination of extended schooling and child labor reform removed youth from the emerging primary sector and into casual labor, a pattern that has been reinforced ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Black teenagers, in particular, experience very high jobless levels. The average number of unemployed black teenagers in 1979 was about 320,000, and their rate of unemployment, 36.5 percent, was only slightly lower than that reached at the bottom of the 1973-75 recession. While joblessness did not decline significantly among black youth, it did decline considerably among white youth over the last 3 years, from 17.9 percent in 1975 at the deepest point of the recession to 13.9 percent during 1979.

Hispanics, too, account for a disproportionate share of the Nation's unemployed. During 1978, the jobless rate for 16- to 19-year-old Hispanics was 20.6 percent, well above the rate

for their white counterparts, but still much lower than that for black teens. Hispanic youth, however, experienced some relief from the high unemployment that prevailed in the mid-1970's, as their rate fell from 27.7 percent in 1975 to 19.1 percent in 1979. Among the Hispanic groups, Puerto Rican youth had the highest jobless rate in 1979, 27.8 percent, compared with 16.9 percent for workers of Mexican origin.

The differential patterns in unemployment can be further examined by school enrollment status. A strong relationship exists between unemployment and dropping out of high school; the incidence of unemployment among teenage dropouts was 23.8 percent in October 1978, while for high school graduates, the rate was 11.5 percent, and for students, 15.3 percent.

One of the major problems of school dropouts is that they become committed to the labor force before they are eligible for most career jobs. They often must compete with students for the "youth" jobs and lack the necessary experience and expertise that comes with age to be eligible for career jobs. In many cases, high school dropouts remain permanently ineligible for a number of career jobs, as they lack the necessary educational credentials (i.e., high school diploma) to be hired. Some researchers feel that dropping out of school and the often resulting unemployment is but a symptom of a youth's basic limitations (family background, area of residence, living conditions, poor school performance, etc.), all of which hinder such persons in their search for employment.<sup>6</sup>

The area of residence also is significant in analyzing teenage unemployment. White, black, and Hispanic youth who were central city residents had the most difficulty in obtaining jobs; employment opportunities were about the same for those living in either the suburban or nonmetropolitan areas. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate for black teenagers was

### III. The Nature of Youth Unemployment

more than twice that of their white peers and close to double that of Hispanic youth (table 4).

In 1979, more than one-half the youth who experienced unemployment were unemployed no more than 4 weeks during the year, reflecting, in large part, the seasonal or intermittent nature of labor force participation for many teenagers. For workers 25 years and older, only two-fifths had such a short duration of unemployment.

There were noticeable differences in the duration of unemployment by race also; periods totaling 15 weeks or more were reported by about 17 percent of the black youth, but only by 10 percent of the whites.

Not surprisingly, most teenage unemployment is associated with entry or reentry into the labor market. In 1979, about two-thirds of all unemployed teenagers were new entrants or reentrants to the labor force. Roughly 40 percent had never worked before. While over one-half of all unemployed workers 25 years of age and over had lost their last job, about one-fifth of all teens had lost their job. Thus, much of the youth unemployment can be attributed to the job search effort associated with voluntary job turnover, interruptions in employment due to school and other activities, and initial labor market entry. In general, higher teenage unemployment rates result from the greater frequency of individual bouts of unemployment rather than the long duration of a single spell of unemployment.

The incidence of unemployment among teenagers over an entire year—as distinguished from the incidence at each point in time—is also more severe than among adults, but the disparity is not as great. In 1978, over one-fourth of both the 16- to 19-year-olds and the 20- to 24-year-olds who were in the labor force during the year had some periods of unemployment; this compares to 12 percent among persons 25 years and over or about one-half that for youths.

In comparison, the unemployment rate of teenagers at a single point in time is about four times that of adult workers (table 6).

While this report focuses on those teenagers who are in the labor force, a large number of young persons either are unable to work or choose not to work. During 1979, over two-fifths of the teenagers were outside the labor force; most of these, about three-fourths, cited school attendance as their reason for nonparticipation.

A small proportion of the teenagers not in the labor force express the desire to work but, for a variety of personal or job-market-related reasons, are not seeking employment. One group of these individuals is of particular importance—those who want a job now but are not actively looking for work because they believe that no jobs are available (hence they cannot be classified as unemployed). This group we term “discouraged workers.”

Teenagers constitute over 16 percent of all discouraged workers, a disproportionate share when compared with their size in the labor force, about 10 percent. Teenage men account for a much larger proportion of discouraged men than teenage women do of all discouraged women; close to one-fourth of all discouraged men were teenagers, while slightly over one-tenth of discouraged women were that young. Also, black youth (16 to 24 years) were much more likely than white youth to become discouraged over job prospects.

Teenagers, more than others in the population, move frequently from one labor force category to another (i.e., from employed to not in the labor force, from unemployed to employed, etc.). A recent study noted that between 60 and 70 percent of all teenagers who become employed were previously outside the labor force; it also found that most of the teenagers who leave employment leave the labor force rather than become unemployed. The evidence suggests the possibility that, for many teenagers, job search is a

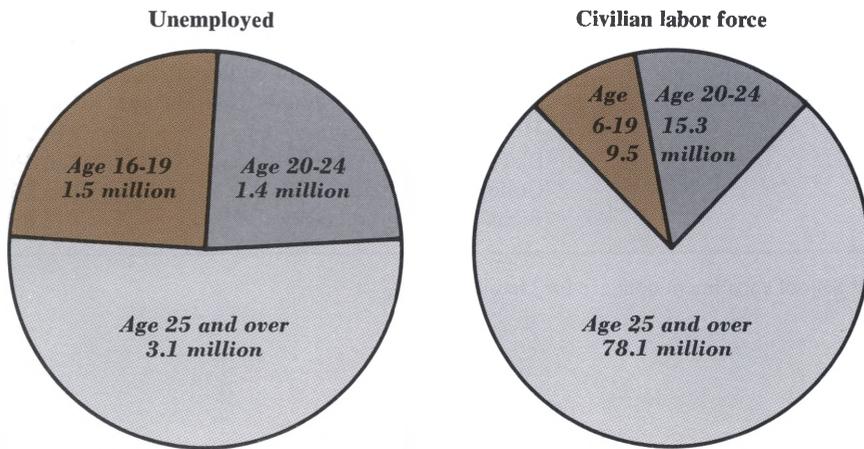
passive process in which the main activity is waiting for a job.<sup>7</sup> This is supported by data that show that, for both black and white teenagers, approximately 70 percent reported that they spent no more than 10 hours per week engaged in job search. This suggests that many young people only enter the labor force when a job is presented.<sup>8</sup> It is also likely that many jobs for youth are relatively easy to obtain—by virtue of their being frequently vacated, having low wages, requiring marginal experience, etc.—that only limited search is necessary in the first place.

<sup>5</sup> Osterman, "Youth, Work, and Unemployment."

<sup>6</sup> Jerome Johnston and Jerald G. Bachman, *The Transition from High School to Work: The Work Attitudes and Early Occupational Experiences of Young Men* (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Institute for Social Research, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Kim B. Clark and Lawrence H. Summers, *The Dynamics of Youth Unemployment* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, National Bureau of Economic Research, May 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Norman Bowers, "Young and Marginal: An Overview of Data and Theory on Trends in Youth Employment," *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct. 1979.

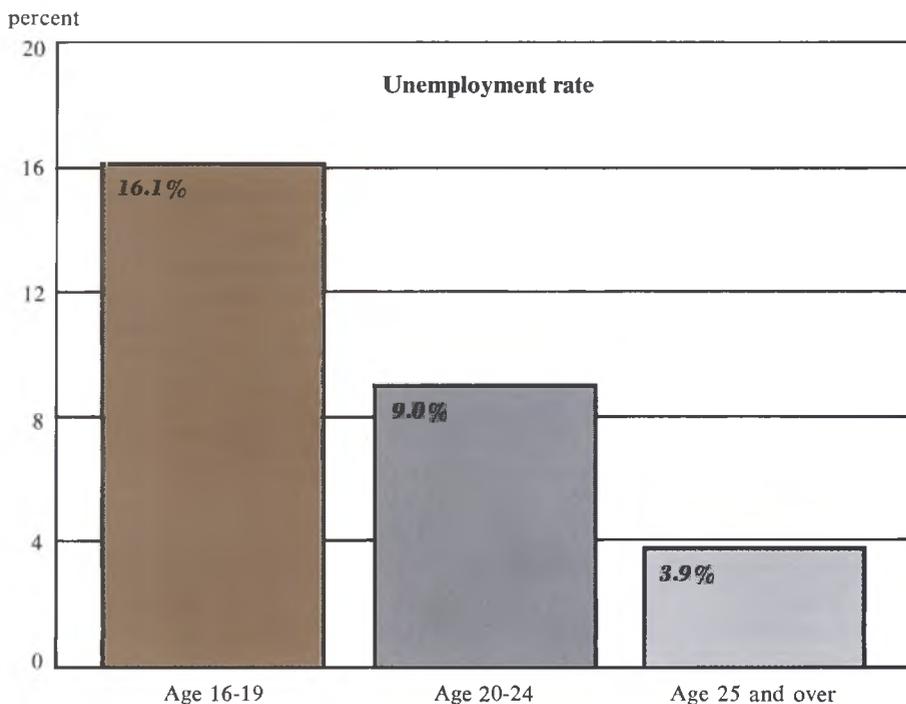


**CHART 23.**

**Civilian Labor Force, Unemployed, and Unemployment Rates of Teenagers.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

*Teenagers accounted for about one-tenth of the Nation's labor force in 1979, but over one-fourth of the unemployed.*



**TABLE 5.**  
**Probability of Unemployment.**  
**1979 Annual Averages.<sup>1</sup>**

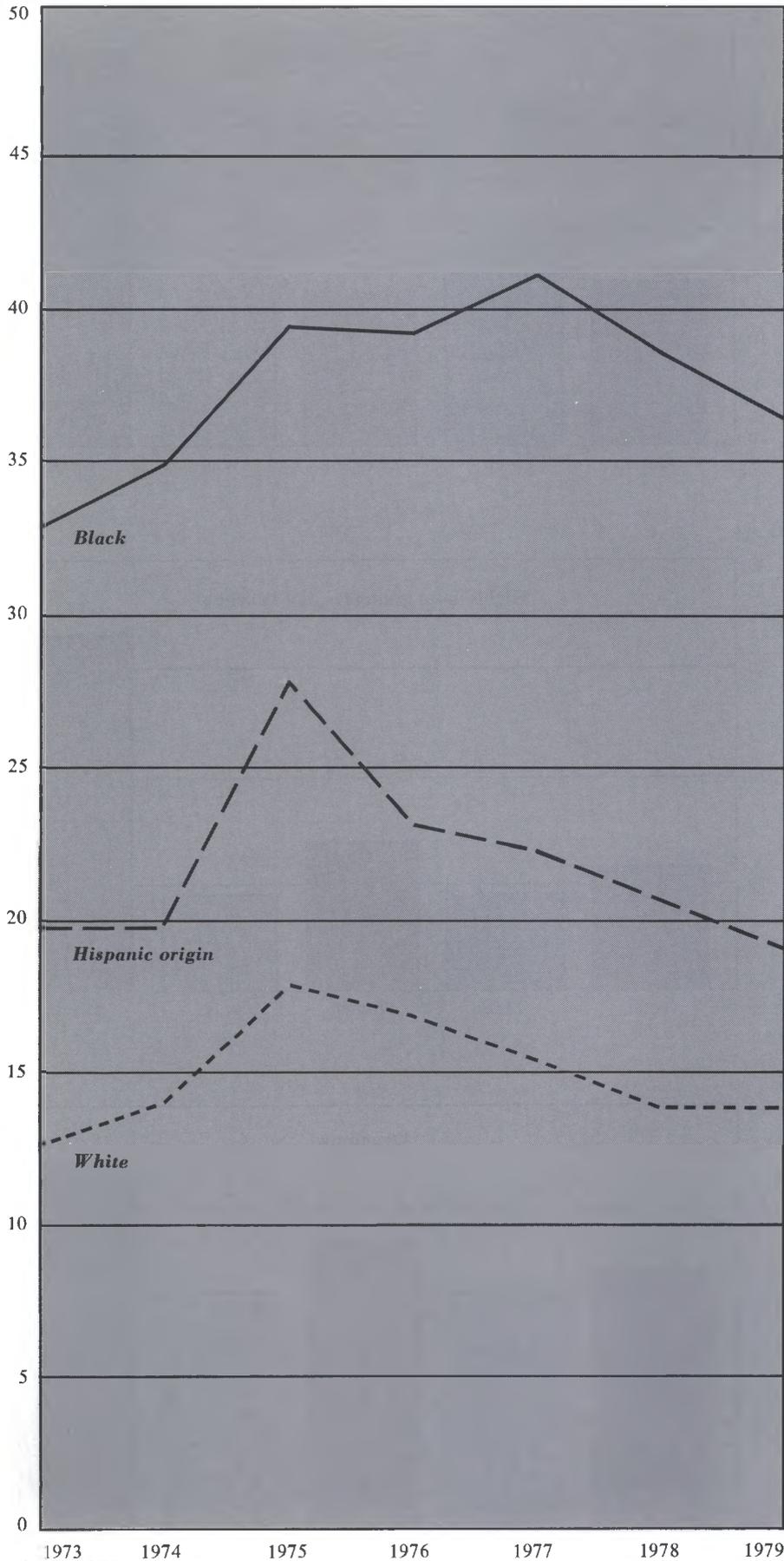
If you were . . .		Your chances of being unemployed were about
Age:	14-15 years	1 in 6½
	16-19 years	1 in 6
	16-17 years	1 in 5½
	18-19 years	1 in 7
	20-24 years	1 in 11
	25 years or over	1 in 25½
Age 16-19 and:	White	1 in 7
	Black	1 in 3
	Hispanic	1 in 5
Age 16-19, and living in a:	Central city	1 in 5
	Suburban area	1 in 7
	Nonmetropolitan area	1 in 6½
	Farm	1 in 16½
	Nonfarm	1 in 6
Age 16-24, not in school, and a:	High school graduate (no college)	1 in 13
	Black high school graduate (no college)	1 in 5
	High school dropout	1 in 5½
	Black high school dropout	1 in 3½
	College graduate	1 in 16
	Black college graduate	1 in 6½

<sup>1</sup> School enrollment data are for October 1978.

**TABLE 6.**  
**Persons with Unemployment during 1978 by Number of Spells, Age, Sex, and Race.**

Age, Sex, and Race	Total working or looking for work during year	Persons with Unemployment		
		Number	Percent of total working or looking	Percent with 2 or more spells of unemployment
16-19	11,319	3,089	27.3	30.9
20-24	17,347	4,548	26.2	30.6
25 and over	83,693	10,101	12.1	27.2
Men 16-19	5,968	1,656	27.7	33.6
Women 16-19	5,352	1,434	26.8	27.9
White 16-19	10,032	2,528	25.2	31.4
Black 16-19	1,116	510	45.7	28.4

percent of labor force unemployed



**CHART 24.**

**Teenage Unemployment Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin. 1973-79.**

*The jobless rate of Hispanic teenagers has been well above the rate for their white counterparts but much lower than that for blacks.*

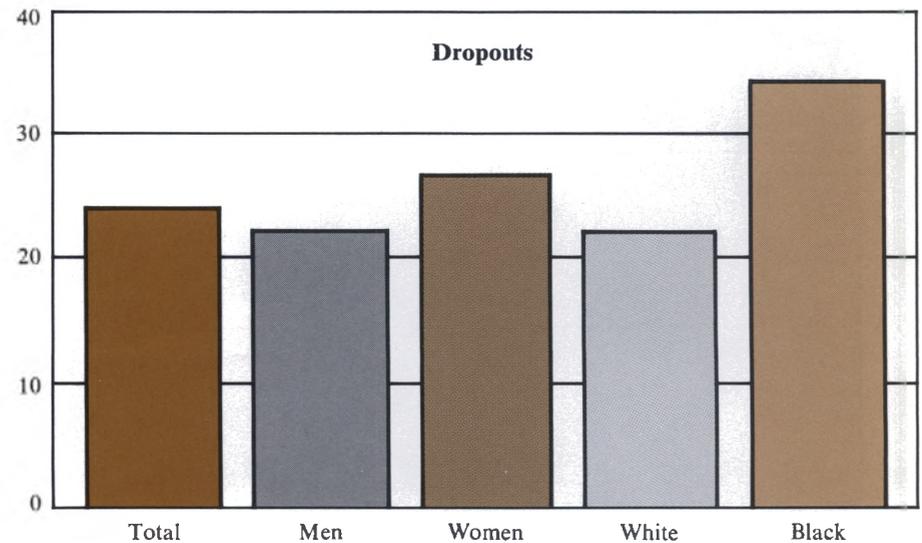
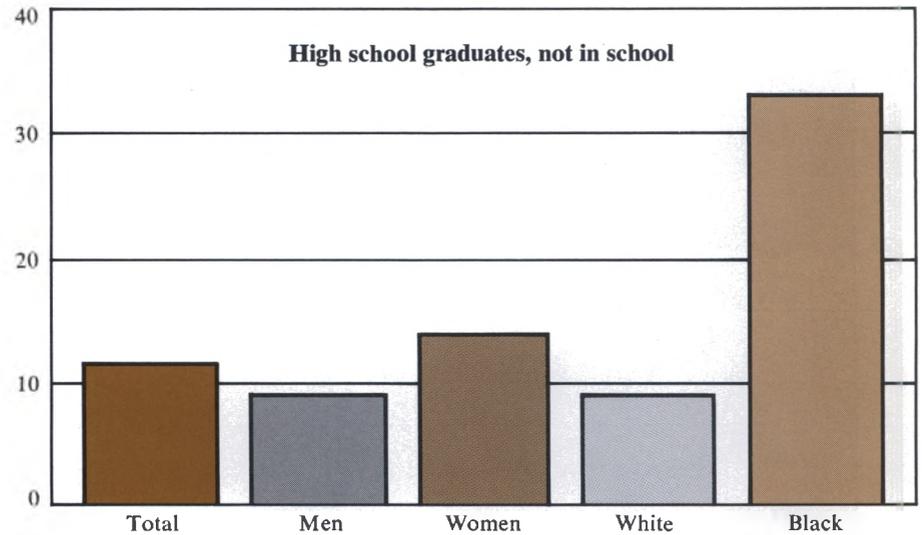
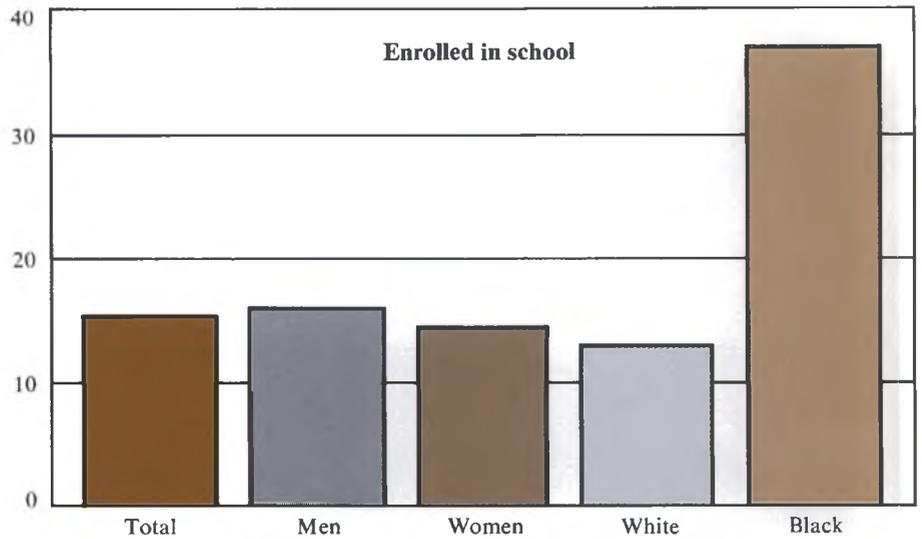
**CHART 25.**

**Unemployment Rates of Teenagers  
by School Enrollment Status, Sex,  
and Race.**

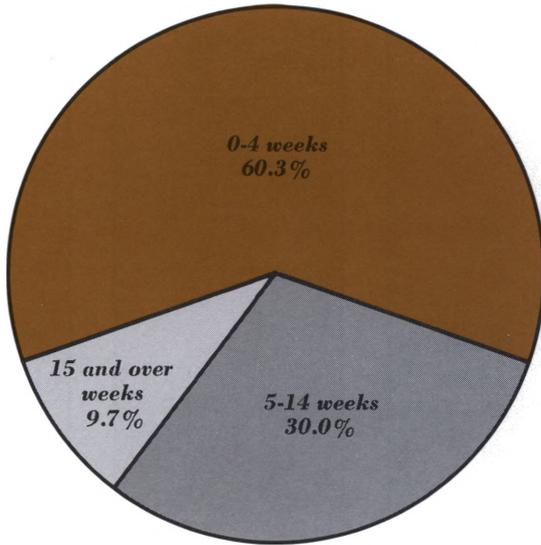
**October 1978.**

*The unemployment rate for teenage dropouts was double that for high school graduates not enrolled in school in October 1978.*

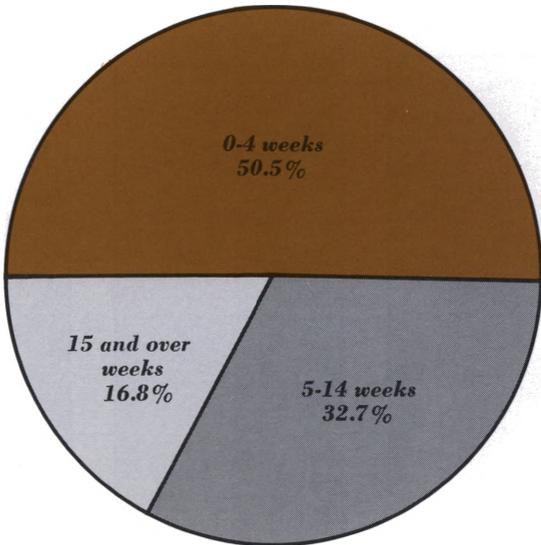
percent of labor force unemployed



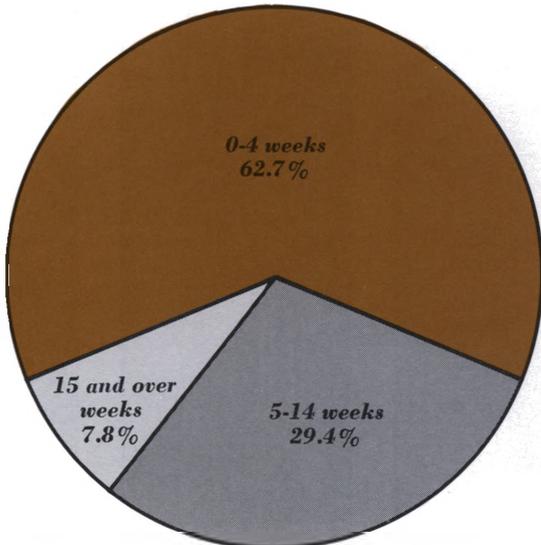
White



Black and other



Hispanic origin



**CHART 26.**

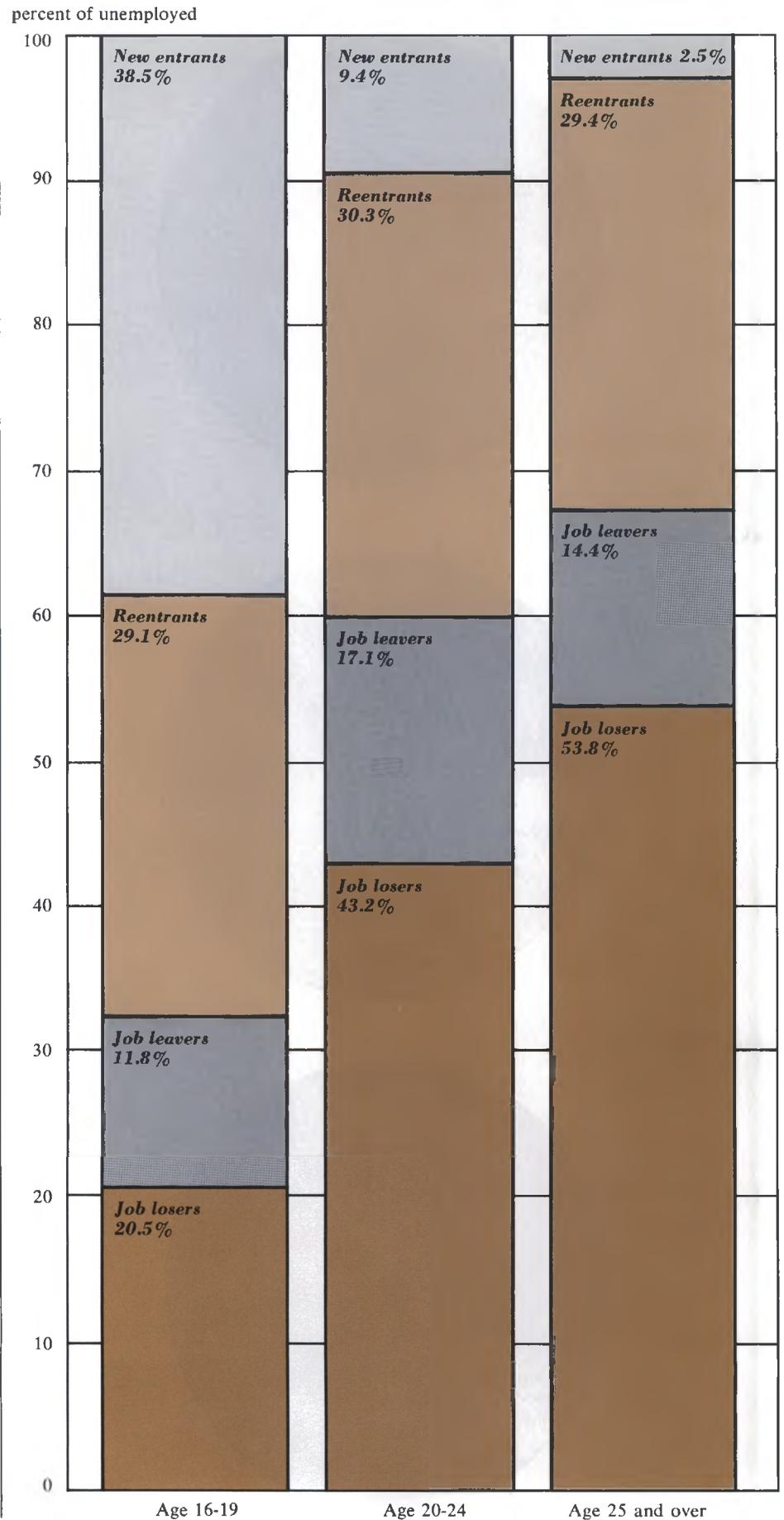
**Duration of Teenage Unemployment  
by Race and Hispanic Origin.  
1979 Annual Averages.**

*More than one-half of all youth who experienced unemployment in 1979 were unemployed no more than 4 weeks during the year.*

**CHART 27.**

**Unemployed Persons by Reason for Unemployment, by Age.  
1979 Annual Averages.**

*Most teenage unemployment is associated with entry or reentry into the labor market.*

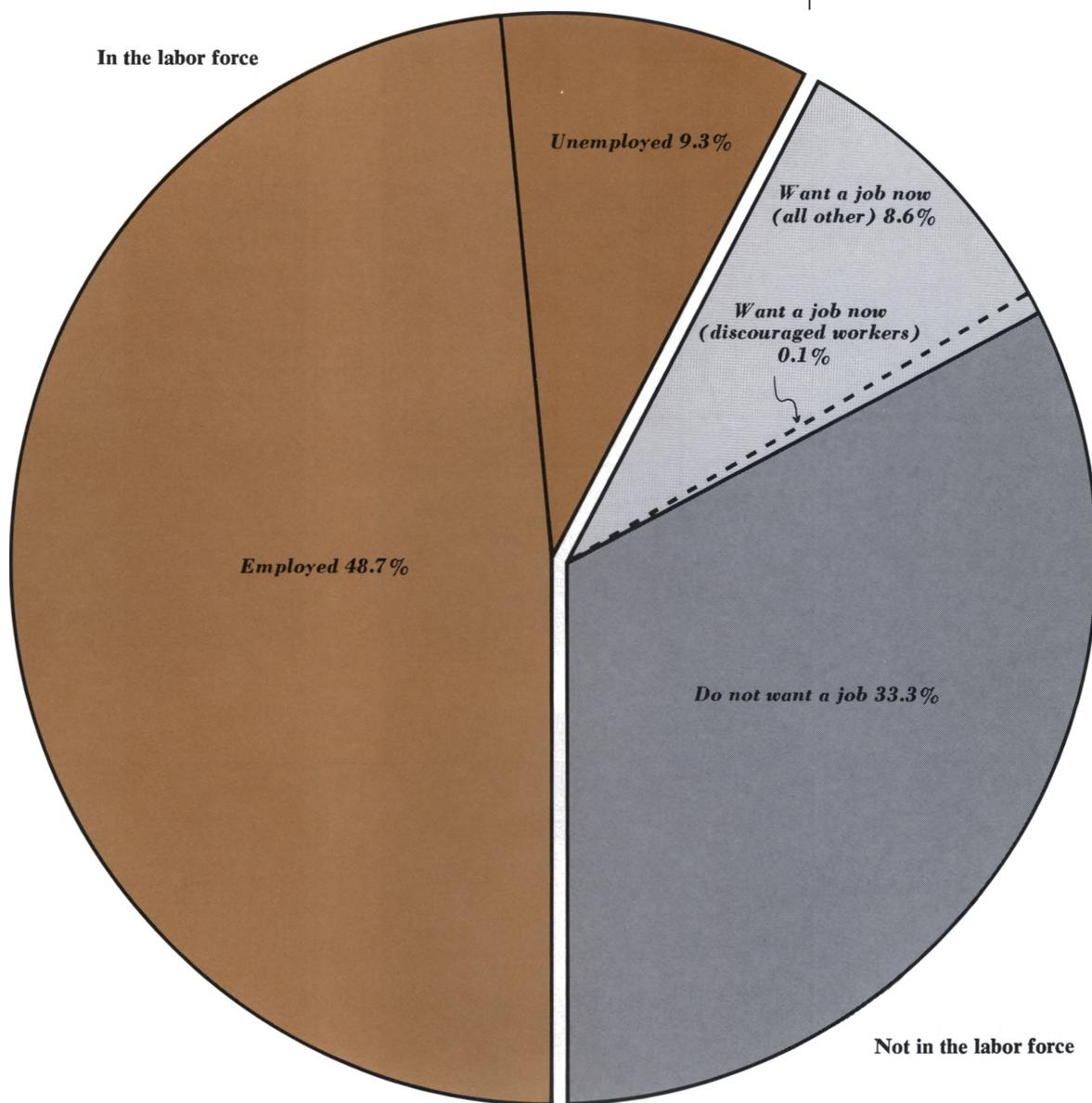


**CHART 28.**

**Labor Force Status of Teenagers.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

*A large number of teenagers either are unable to work or choose not to work. During 1979, over two-fifths of the teenagers were outside the labor force.*

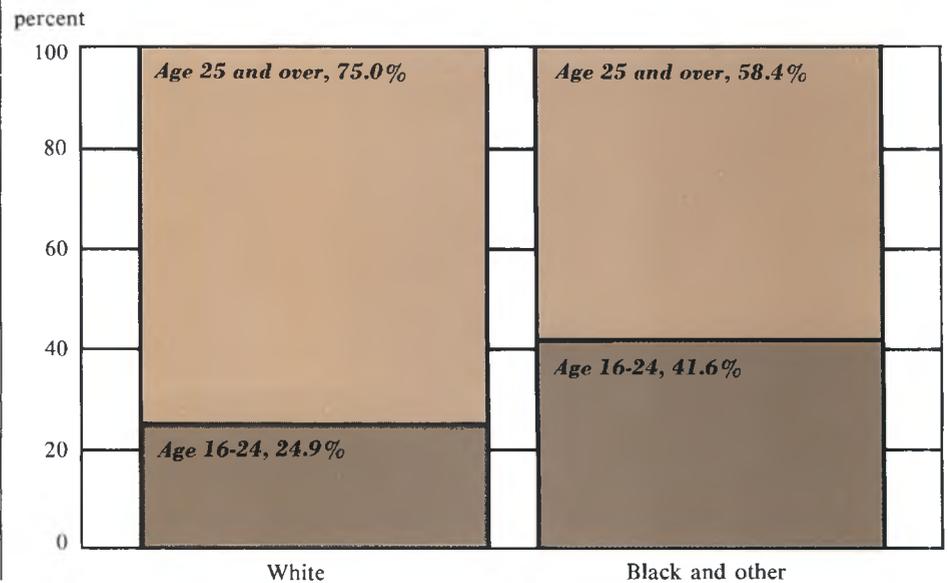
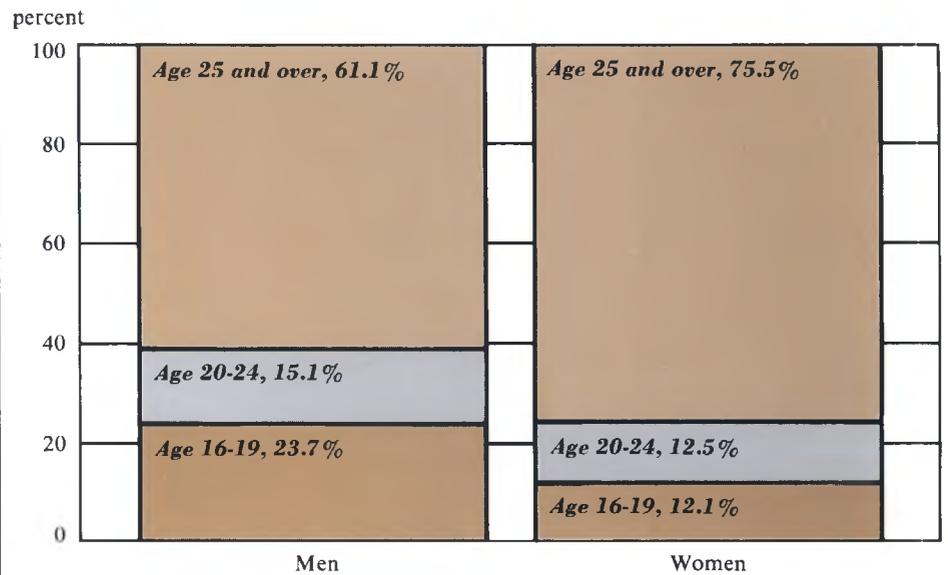
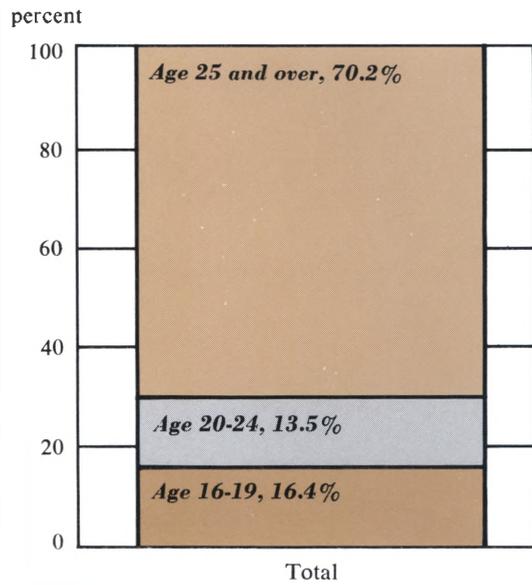


**CHART 29.**

**Discouraged Workers by Age, Sex, and Race.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

*Teenagers, about 10 percent of the labor force, constituted 16 percent of the discouraged workers in 1979.*



The process of moving from school to work, i.e., from the youth job market into the career job market, can be called the transition. The transition does not occur until the very late teens or early 20's for most youth and often is difficult.

There is a distinct connection between formal schooling and labor market activity. Generally, labor force participation rates are higher and unemployment rates are lower for persons with greater amounts of education. In March 1979, the proportion of teenagers working or seeking work ranged from a low of 38 percent among the population group with less than 8 years of school to 70 percent for those with 4 years of high school. (Most teenagers have not yet had a chance to finish college.) Likewise, unemployment rates were highest (30.9 percent) for persons who had 8 years or less of elementary school and lowest (4.7 percent) for those teenagers with some years of college. Among young persons age 20 to 24 years, there was a noticeable increase in participation and a corresponding decline in unemployment in every educational category. (table 7).

The labor force status of youth, in conjunction with their school enrollment, provides an indication of those most likely to incur problems in making the school-to-work transition. A study by Johnston and Bachman<sup>9</sup> found that extensive work experience during high school was associated with low levels of unemployment after graduation, while failure to work during the high school years was associated with high subsequent unemployment rates. Also, using data from the National Longitudinal Surveys, which trace the labor market experience of a group of teenagers over time, researchers found that time spent out of school and out of the labor force represented a loss of experience that was associated with a clear earnings disadvantage later on. And, those who experienced unemployment while in school could expect to earn less on average than those who

were employed while in school or who were out of the labor force and devoting full time to school activities. The probability of being unemployed at a later date was much higher if the teenage period had been spent out of work and out of school. It appears then, that, on average, those having difficult labor market experiences as youths also have more difficulty later on.<sup>10</sup>

The transition from school to work takes place gradually for most young persons, with school activity falling off and labor force participation increasing with age. Jobs held during school tend to be part time and to require little skill or training. However, the nature of unemployment among young adults (20 to 24 years) appears more in line with that of workers 25 years and over than of teenagers. For example, in 1979, 28.5 percent of all teenagers were service workers, but the proportion decreased to 13.5 percent among young adults, much closer to the average for workers 25 years and over (11.5 percent).

As teenagers mature, their earnings increase, especially if they are white or male. Weekly earnings of teenagers who usually worked full time averaged \$143 in 1979, about 50 percent of the earnings of adult workers, 25 years and over. The earnings differential between white and black workers and between male and female workers increases with age. For example, black and white teenagers both earned close to \$140 per week in 1979; however, white adult earnings were double those of white teenagers at almost \$280, while those of black adults were only one and one-half times the earnings of teenage blacks, at \$217. Overall, there is less variation in weekly earnings between teenage workers than between adult workers.

For the most part, by the time workers are 25 years old, labor force participation has risen, work is predominantly full time, and unemployment

## IV. The Transition from School to Work

rates have fallen. Thus, while the transition process can often be painful and in some cases never satisfactorily achieved, the majority of youth are able to make the transition successfully.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston and Bachman, *The Transition from High School to Work*.

<sup>10</sup> Arvil A. Adams and Garth L. Mangum, *The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment* (Kalamazoo, Mich., Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1978).

percent

Years of School Completed and Age	Total		Men		Women	
	Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate	Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate	Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate
<b>Total</b>						
16-19	54.1	16.3	57.3	17.5	50.9	15.0
20-24	76.3	9.6	84.4	9.7	68.7	9.5
<b>Elementary School</b>						
Less than 8 years						
16-19	37.8	30.9	48.9	26.7	23.1	(1)
20-24	54.4	11.1	74.2	5.9	37.5	18.5
8 years						
16-19	40.7	24.5	46.1	25.0	32.7	22.5
20-24	72.2	18.8	96.5	10.6	44.9	(1)
<b>High School</b>						
1-3 years						
16-19	49.1	19.3	52.6	20.3	45.4	18.1
20-24	68.0	20.6	89.8	18.7	47.6	24.0
4 years						
16-19	70.1	12.2	74.7	12.6	66.3	11.8
20-24	83.1	9.4	94.4	9.1	73.4	9.7
<b>College</b>						
1-3 years						
16-19	51.5	4.7	51.1	5.7	51.9	4.3
20-24	68.4	7.2	69.0	8.4	67.7	6.0
4 years or more						
16-19	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
20-24	85.5	4.0	84.2	4.0	86.6	4.0

(1) Percent not shown where base is less than 75,000.

**Table 7.**

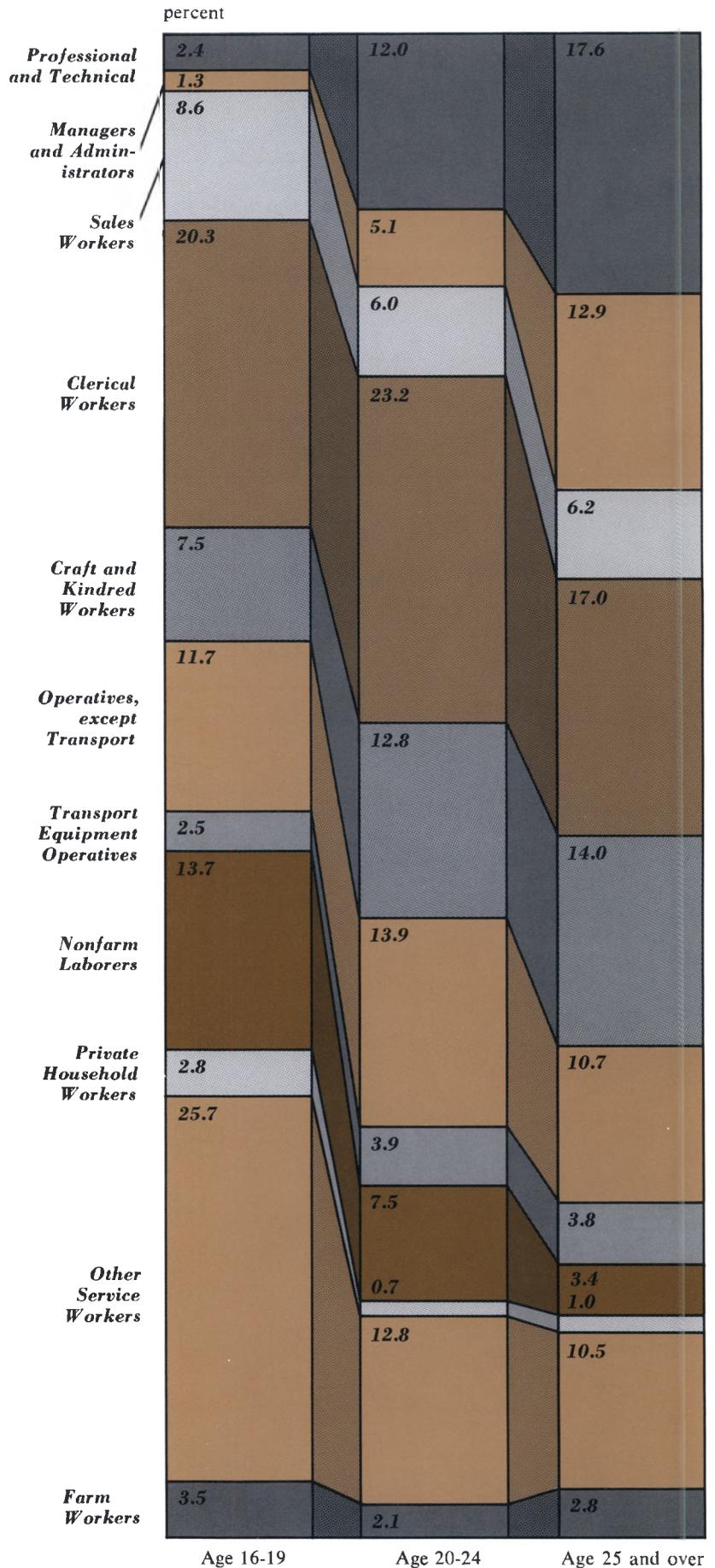
**Labor Force Participation and Unemployment Rates of Persons 16 to 19 and 20 to 24 Years Old by Educational Attainment. March 1979.**

**CHART 30.**

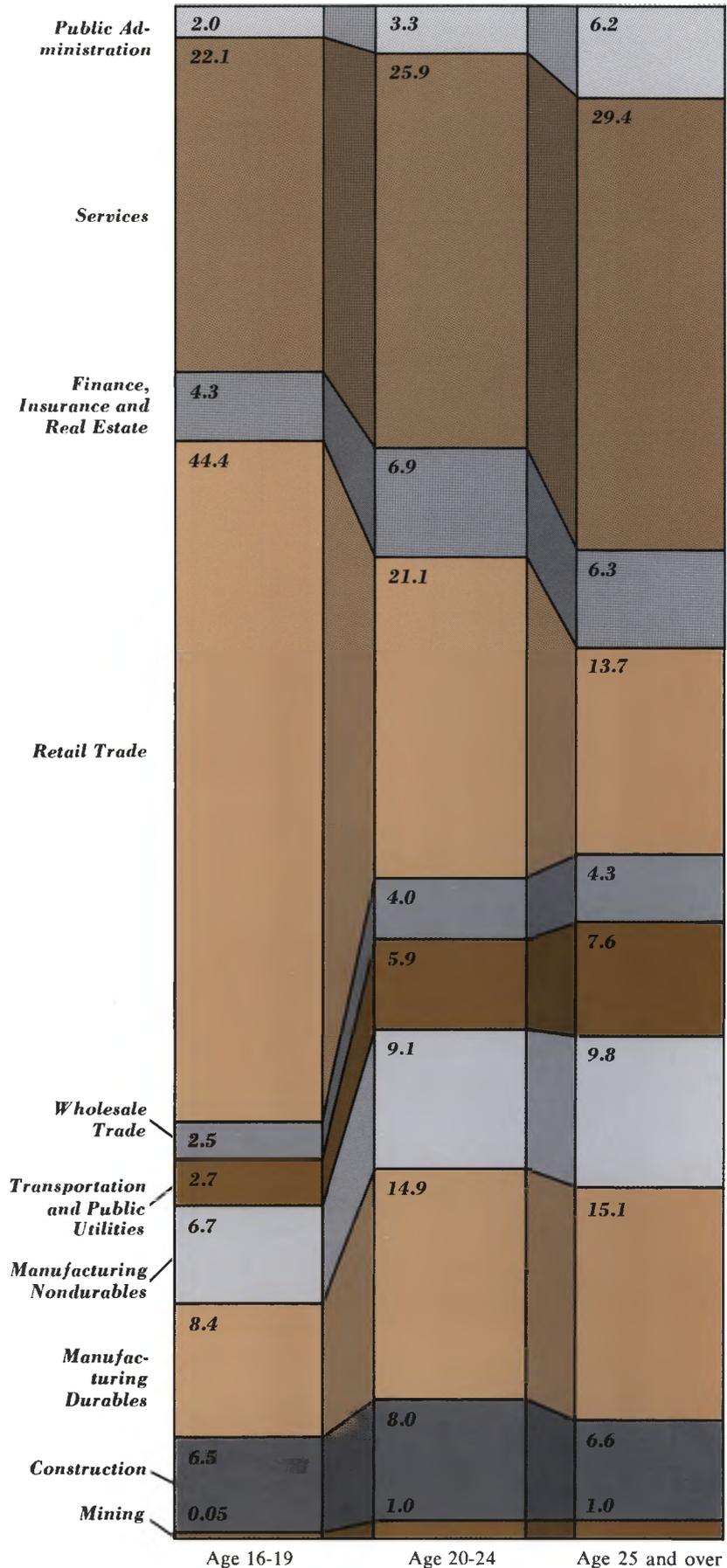
**Employed Persons by Occupation and Age.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

*Teenagers are more likely to be in service occupations than older workers.*



percent



**CHART 31.**

**Employed Persons by Industry and Age.**

**1979 Annual Averages.**

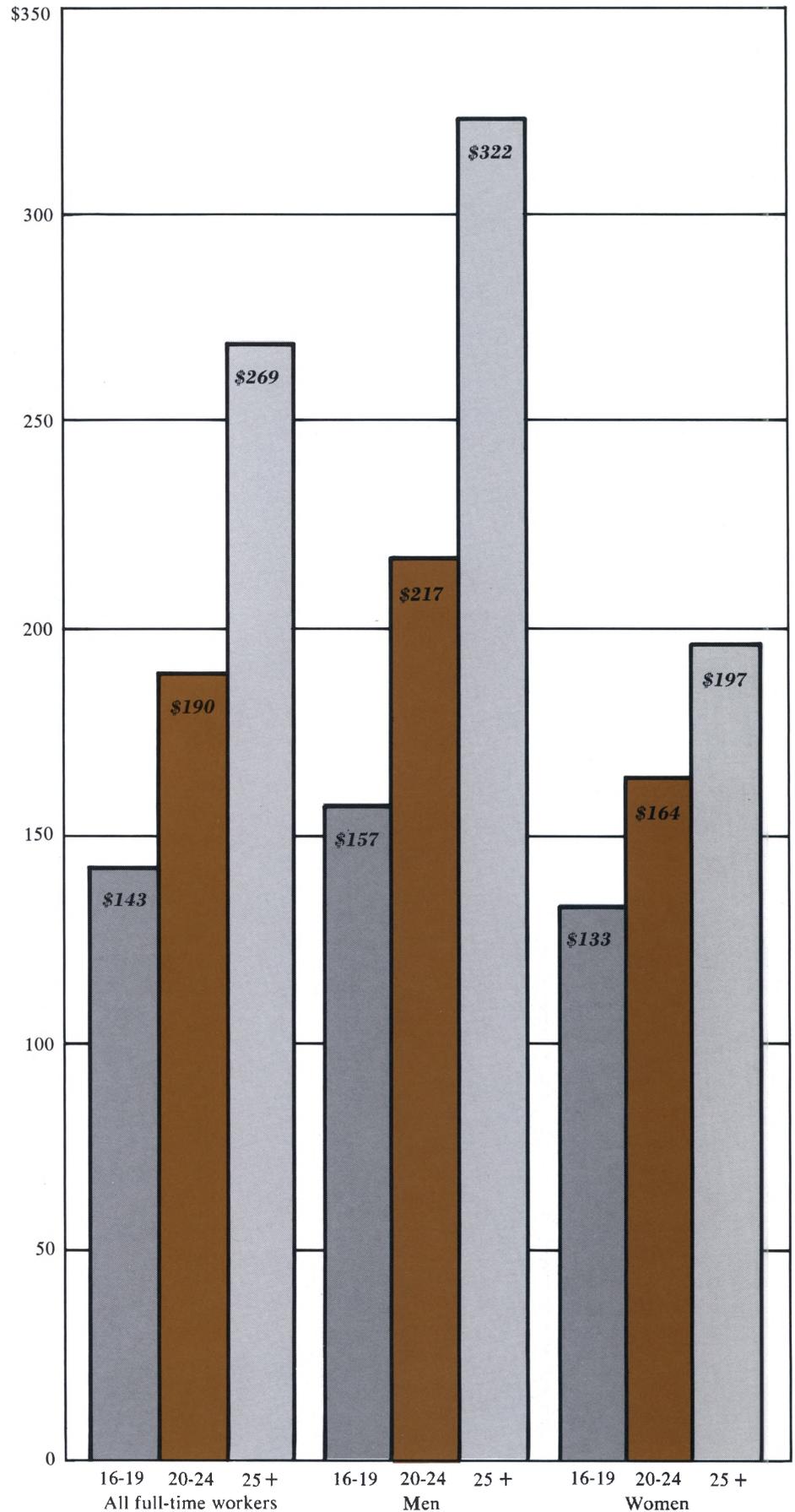
*Teenagers are much more concentrated in retail trade than older workers.*

**CHART 32.**

**Median Weekly Earnings of Those Who Usually Work Full Time by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin. 1979 Annual Averages.**

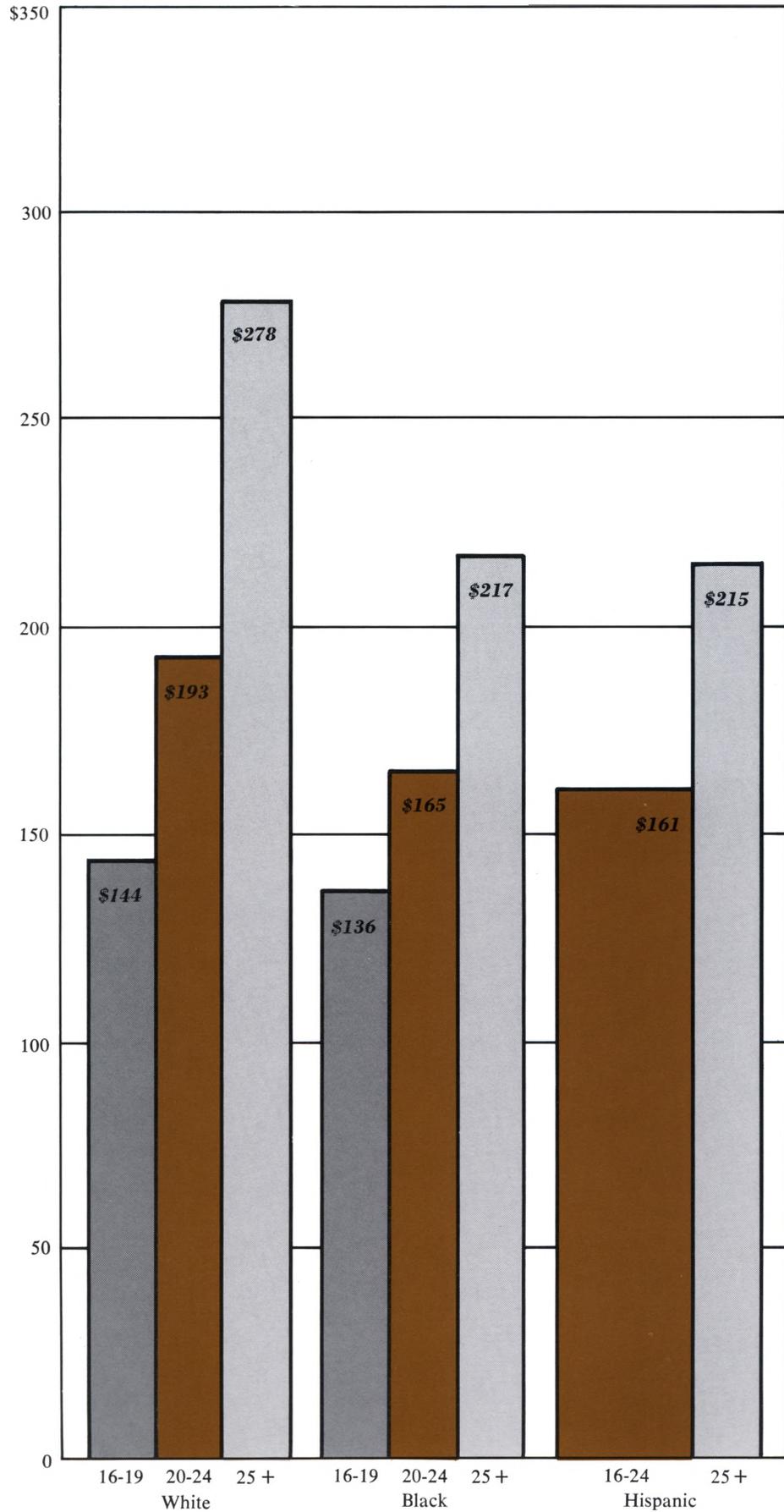
*Teenagers who usually worked full time in 1979 averaged about 50 percent of the earnings of workers age 25 and over.*

median weekly earnings



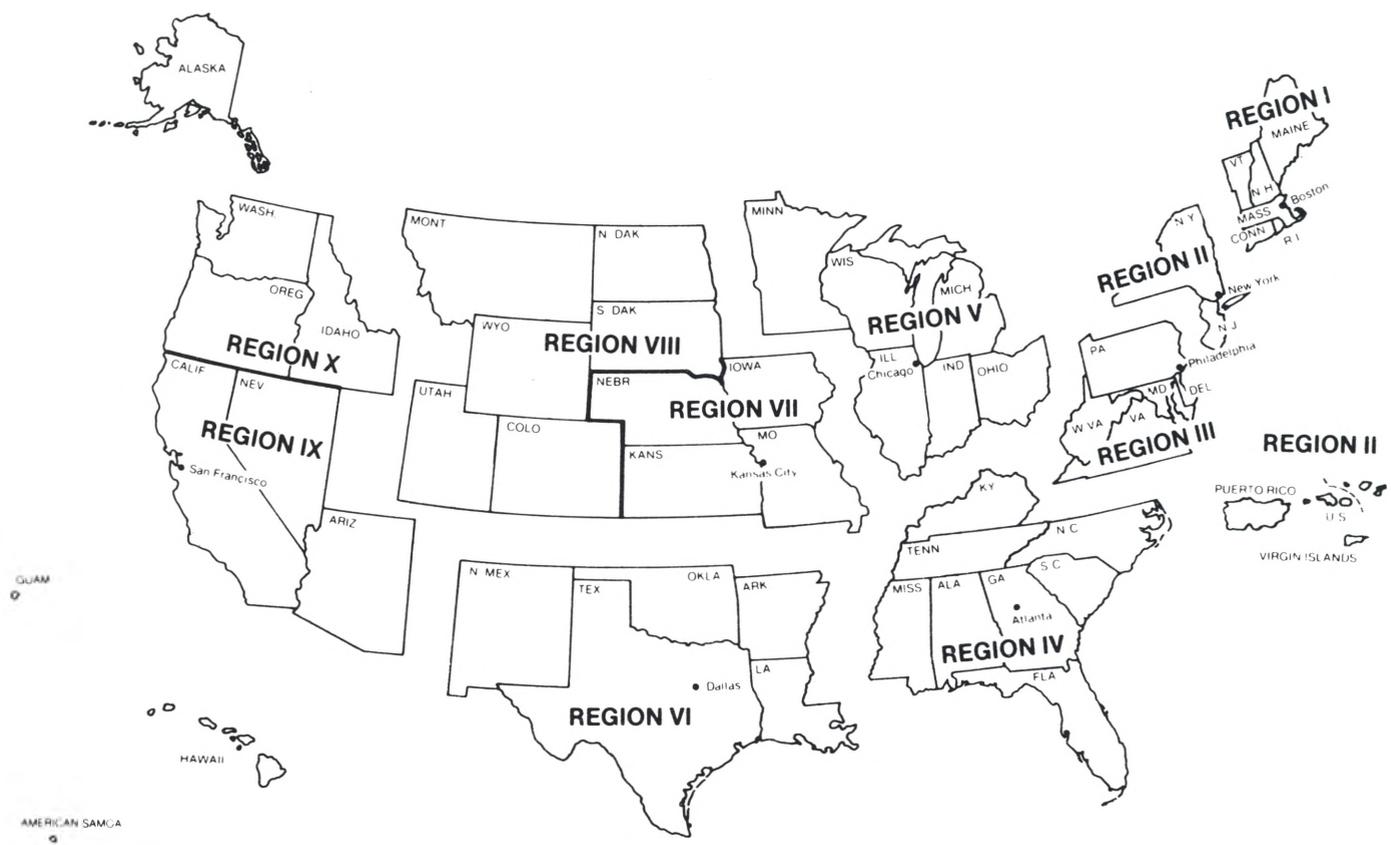
median weekly earnings

CHART 32.- continued.





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