

# The Black Gender Gap in Educational Attainment: Historical Trends and Racial Comparisons

Anne McDaniel  
Department of Sociology  
Ohio State University

Thomas A. DiPrete  
Department of Sociology  
Columbia University

Claudia Buchmann  
Department of Sociology  
The Ohio State University

Uri Shwed  
Department of Sociology  
Columbia University

## **Abstract**

It is often asserted that the gender gap in educational attainment is larger for blacks than whites, but the historical trends that lead up to the current situation have received surprisingly little attention. Analysis of historical data from the U.S. Census IPUMS Samples shows that the gender gap in college completion has evolved differently for whites and blacks. Historically, the black female advantage in educational attainment is linked to more favorable labor market opportunities and stronger incentives for employment for educated black women. Males of both races have tended to delay completion of a college degree, but this pattern is disappearing as the striking educational gains of white women have caused the racial patterns of gender differences in college completion rates to grow more similar over time. Blacks in general and black males in particular continue to lag far behind whites in their rates of college completion. While some have linked the disadvantaged position of black males to their high risk of incarceration, our estimates suggest that incarceration has a relatively small impact on the black gender gap and the racial gap in college completion rates for males in the U.S.