



Blacks and the Quest for Economic Equality: The Political Economy of Employment in Southern Communities in the United States

James W. Button, Barbara A. Rienzo, Sheila L. Croucher

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The civil rights movement of the 1960s improved the political and legal status of African Americans, but the quest for equality in employment and economic well-being has lagged behind. Blacks are more than twice as likely as whites to be employed in lower-paying service jobs or to be unemployed, are three times as likely to live in poverty, and have a median household income barely half of that for white households. What accounts for these disparities, and what possibilities are there for overcoming obstacles to black economic progress? This book seeks answers to these questions through a combined quantitative and qualitative study of six municipalities in Florida.

Factors impeding the quest for equality include employer discrimination, inadequate education, increasing competition for jobs from white females and Latinos, and a lack of transportation, job training, affordable childcare, and other sources of support, which makes it difficult for blacks to compete effectively. Among factors aiding in the quest is the impact of black political power in enhancing opportunities for African Americans in municipal employment.

The authors conclude by proposing a variety of ameliorative measures: strict enforcement of antidiscrimination laws; public policies to provide disadvantaged people with a good education, adequate shelter and food, and decent jobs; and self-help efforts by blacks to counter self-destructive attitudes and activities.

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