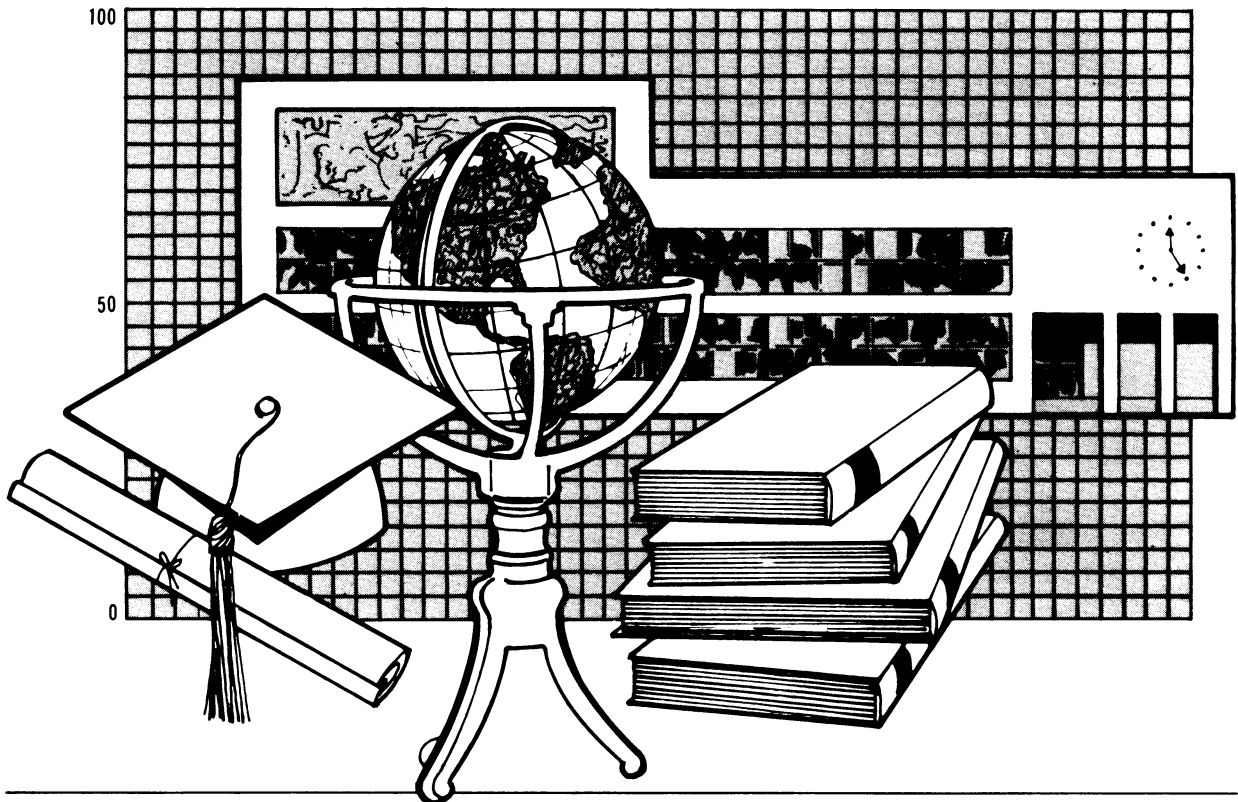


Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1987 and 1986



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Data collection was conducted by Bureau of the Census interviewers, under the overall direction of **Stanley D. Matchett**, Chief, Field Division. Computer programming was provided by **Phyllis C. Swanson**, and survey operations were coordinated by **Kathleen P. Creighton**, Demographic Surveys Division. Table preparation was provided by **Brenda R. Jeffries**, and statistical testing was performed by **Andrea E. Adams**, Population Division. **Martin O'Connell** and **Steve W. Rawlings**, Population Division, reviewed the contents of the report. Statistical review of the text and appendix B were provided by **Lloyd W. Hicks, Jr.**, Statistical Methods Division.

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United States:
March 1987 and 1986**

By Robert Kominski

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U.S. Department of Commerce
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BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
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William P. Butz, Associate Director for
Demographic Fields
Roger A. Herriot, Senior Demographic and
Housing Analyst

POPULATION DIVISION

Paula J. Schneider, Chief

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Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1986 and 1987

INTRODUCTION

This report contains data from the Current Population Surveys (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census in March 1986 and 1987. Summary data on years of school completed by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin are shown for 1986 and 1987 in table 1. Detailed data are shown for 1987 in tables 2 through 10. This allows for the continuation of the biennial series of detailed tables as presented in previous reports. Tables 11 and 12 contain a time series of the data collected from 1940 to 1987 in the decennial censuses and CPS (1947-1987).

The detailed tables present data on years of school completed by persons 15 years old and over by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, type of residence, region of residence, occupation, marital status, and education of spouse. Also, summary data are presented for the 15 largest States and metropolitan areas.

This report is designed to provide published tabulations of the data and a short discussion of basic trends; detailed analysis of these data will be included as part of additional analytic reports. Percentages in the text are shown with the necessary amounts to add and subtract in order to construct 90-percent confidence intervals. For details of calculation and interpretation, see appendix B, Source and Reliability of the Estimates.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN 1987

The educational level of the adult population continued to move upwards in 1987, continuing the general trend that has been noted consistently in the Current Population Survey data since first produced in 1947. About three-quarters (75.6 \pm .3) percent of all adults ages 25 or older reported that they had completed at least 4 years of high school, the highest level measured in the history of the survey. Educational attainment in 1987 reached a peak level not only for the entire population, but also for both sexes, White persons, and Hispanic persons. (The proportion for Blacks was not statistically different from the 1986 level, but both the 1987 and 1986 figures were higher than in previous years.)

Another basic measure of educational attainment is the proportion of persons who have obtained a college education. As with high school completion, this

figure is also at a record-high level. One in five adults (19.9 \pm .3) percent) ages 25 or above has completed four or more years of college. The proportion of the population having attained this level of education has doubled in the past 20 years.

Traditionally, differences in educational attainment have been noted across many dimensions; in 1987, this continued to be true. Table A shows the educational attainment of the population age 25 and older, cross-classified by a series of sociodemographic factors, in order to illustrate some of these differences. The proportion of adult men completing high school (76.0 \pm .4) percent) is slightly higher than it is for women (75.3 \pm .4) percent). While substantively this would appear to be a small difference, one should remember that as recently as 1969 the proportion of women who were high school graduates exceeded the proportion for males. Education differences between males and females are much more pronounced at the college level, where the proportion of men with 4 or more years of college completed (23.6 \pm .4) percent) is about 1.4 times the proportion for women (16.5 \pm .3) percent). By contrast, in 1967, the ratio of the proportions of men and women who had completed 4 or more years of college was about 1.7.

Differences between White and Black persons are much more substantial than those across gender. While 77 \pm .3) percent of White adults have completed high school, the same is true for 63.4 \pm 1.0) percent of Blacks. Examination of the proportions over time for the two races indicates that the gap has narrowed considerably, even in the past 10 years, but is still large. At the college level, differences are also evident; 20.5 \pm .3) percent of Whites and 10.7 \pm .6) percent of Blacks have completed 4 or more years of college. By contrast, a third (33.4 \pm 1.7) percent) of the adults of other races (for example, Asian and Pacific Islanders) have completed 4 or more years of college.

In 1987, the educational attainment of Hispanic persons was considerably lower than that for persons of White or Black races.¹ About one-half (50.9 \pm 1.3) percent) of Hispanics ages 25 and older had completed high school, and 8.6 \pm .7) percent had finished 4 or more years of college.

¹Hispanic origin is an ethnic grouping, not a racial category; persons who report themselves as Hispanics may be of any race. In the March 1987 CPS, about 97 percent of all Hispanics were White.

Geographic variation in attainment levels is also evident. Among the four census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) the percentage of persons who completed 4 years of high school or more ranges from 70.8 ($\pm .5$) in the South to 80.6 ($\pm .5$) in the West. There is also a difference between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, where, respectively, 77.6 ($\pm .3$) and 68.7 ($\pm .8$) percent of adults had completed high school.

One other dimension which shows great variability in proportions of persons completing high school or college is age. In general, attainment levels are lowest for the oldest persons, and across age groups there are rising levels of completion (both high school and college). The youngest age group (ages 25 to 34) deviates from this pattern in table A, principally because

these individuals have not completed their schooling, particularly at the postsecondary level. High school completion is twice as likely among persons ages 35 to 44 than it is for those who are ages 75 or older, and persons completing 4 or more years of college constitute three times the proportion of this young group as they do for the oldest group shown in table A.

The data shown in table A are meant to be illustrative of some of the differences that exist along socio-demographic dimensions. These factors are not independent of one another, and in some respects may be related. Readers should note that the relationships shown here summarize more detailed and complex relationships between many social and demographic factors and the population's distribution of educational attainment.

Table A. Summary Measures of the Educational Attainment of the Population, Ages 25 and Over

(Numbers in thousands)

Age, sex, race, region, residence, and Hispanic origin	Number of persons	Percentage with—		
		4 years of high school or more	1 or more years of college	4 or more years of college
All persons	149,144	75.6	37.0	19.9
Sex:				
Male	70,677	76.0	40.6	23.6
Female	78,467	75.3	33.6	16.5
Race:				
White	129,170	77.0	37.8	20.5
Black	15,580	63.4	26.4	10.7
Other	4,394	78.4	50.9	33.4
Hispanic origin:				
Hispanic	9,449	50.9	21.9	8.6
Non-Hispanic	139,695	77.3	38.0	20.6
Region:				
Northeast	32,030	76.5	36.8	22.2
Midwest	36,322	77.4	33.7	17.6
South	50,848	70.8	34.1	18.3
West	29,943	80.6	45.9	22.8
Metropolitan residence:				
Metropolitan area	115,614	77.6	40.0	22.1
Nonmetropolitan area	33,529	68.7	26.5	12.6
Age groups:				
25 to 34 years	42,635	86.5	45.4	23.9
35 to 44 years old	33,632	85.9	46.8	26.5
45 to 54 years old	23,018	77.6	35.6	19.5
55 to 64 years old	21,883	67.8	28.0	14.9
65 to 74 years old	17,232	56.9	21.9	10.6
75 years or older	10,743	42.0	18.0	8.9