

Five Charts To Understand Black Registered Apprentices in the United States



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INTRODUCTION

The United States recently celebrated 85 years of the National Apprenticeship Act, which established the first national system of registered apprenticeship programs.¹ Since the act's passing, millions of workers have obtained apprenticeship training in critical industries, including manufacturing, electrical services, construction, and more.

Like most education and training pathways, the innovative expansion of apprenticeship programs over the past years came with exclusionary policies and practices that blocked Black workers from the benefits of apprenticeship.² The long history of racial discrimination among apprenticeship sponsors and employers only began to receive public policy attention in the 1960s and 1970s.³ For instance, the federal government did not set forth minimum nondiscrimination standards in apprenticeships until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴

To achieve racially equitable outcomes in apprenticeship programs, policymakers must understand the structural barriers Black apprentices face. This issue brief analyzes data reported in the Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Database System (RAPIDS) from the U.S. Department of Labor to highlight these structural barriers.

Registered apprenticeship programs are paid training programs that aim to connect workers to well-paying jobs. Some of the most common industries associated with apprenticeships include construction, electrical services, plumbing, and even health care occupations. Registered apprenticeships are administered by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Apprenticeship has gained a renewed reputation as a promising training strategy. The National Office of Apprenticeship prides itself on racial equity efforts under the Biden-Harris administration. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Labor issued grants intended to modernize apprenticeships and increase the representation of workers of color in registered programs.⁵ To increase the number of apprentices of color, the program encouraged new partnerships with apprenticeship programs that directly work with underserved communities. Additionally, the \$1 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by Congress in 2021 includes new grant programs that target apprenticeship programs that serve historically underserved workers.⁶

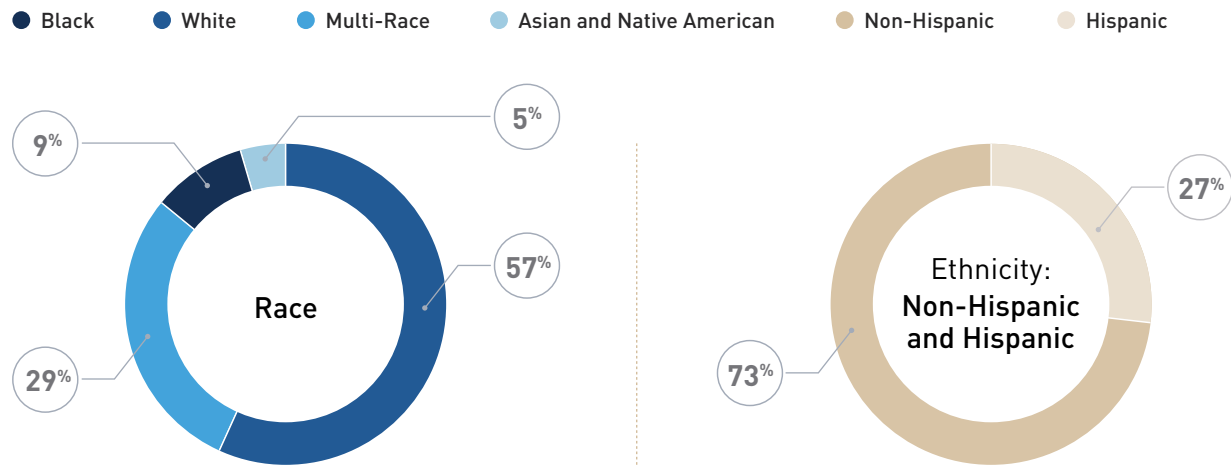
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STRUCTURAL BARRIERS FACING BLACK APPRENTICES

1 Black apprentices are underrepresented in apprenticeship programs

Black workers are underrepresented in registered apprenticeship programs. In 1960, just 3.3 percent of all apprentices were Black.⁸ More than six decades later, only nine percent of registered apprentices are Black despite Black workers making up 12.3 percent of the national labor force.

Percentages of active registered apprentices by race and ethnicity, FY 2021



This chart excludes data from respondents who did not report race in RAPIDS. In FY 2021, program sponsors and employers failed to report the race and/or ethnicity of over 100,000 active registered apprentices.

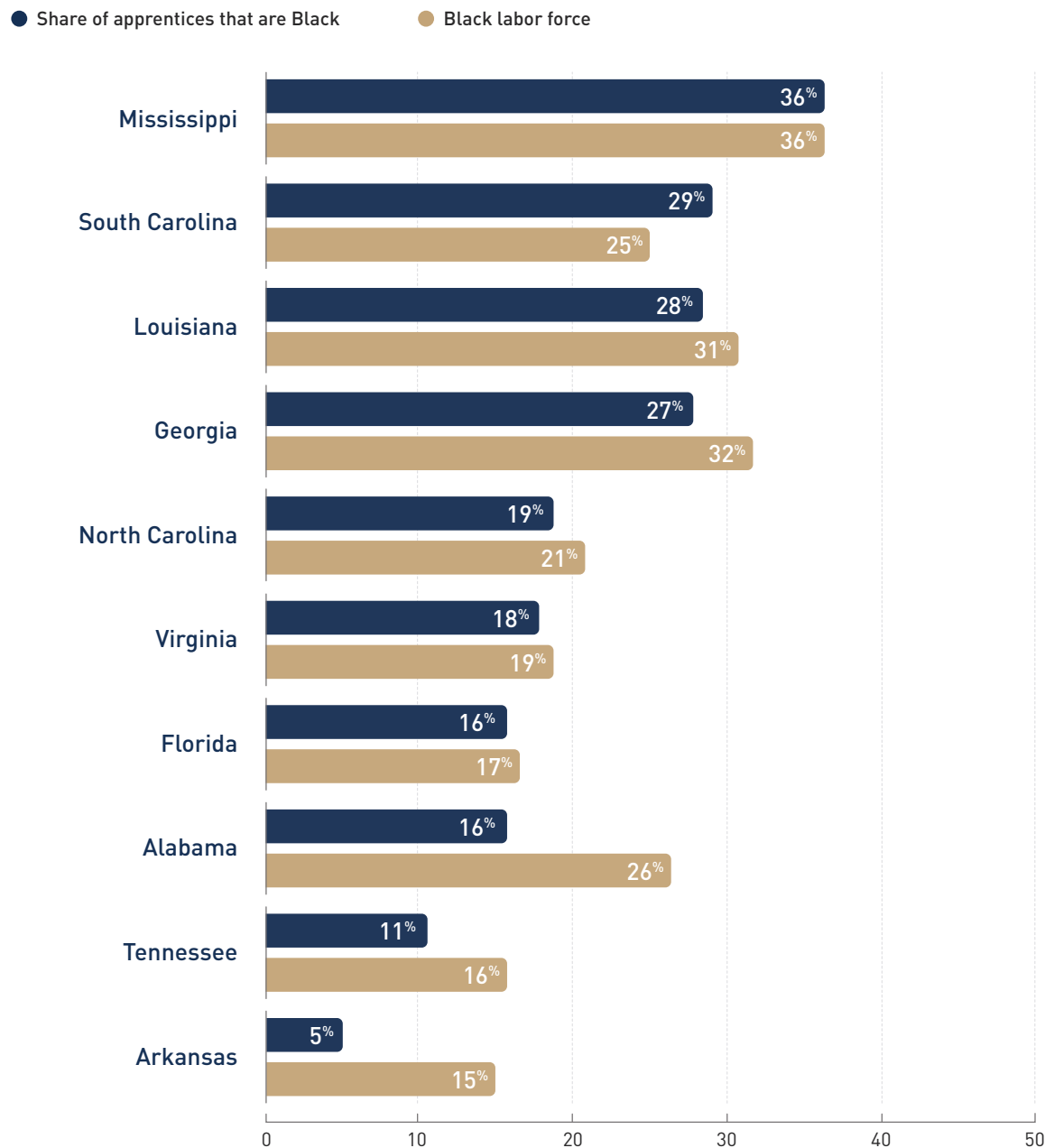
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies analysis of RAPIDS data, U.S. Department of Labor.



2 Black apprentices are concentrated in the South

Like Black workers generally, Black apprentices are concentrated in the American South. Nearly 60 percent of the Black labor force lives in the South.⁹ In some southern states, such as Mississippi and South Carolina, the share of Black apprentices is either on par with or exceeds the share of the state's Black labor force.

Black apprentices as a share of all active apprentices in southern states compared to the states's Black labor force



Source: Joint Center analysis of RAPIDS data, U.S. Department of Labor.

Working conditions in the South lead to poor outcomes for apprentices in the region. State policies in the South are inextricably linked to racism.

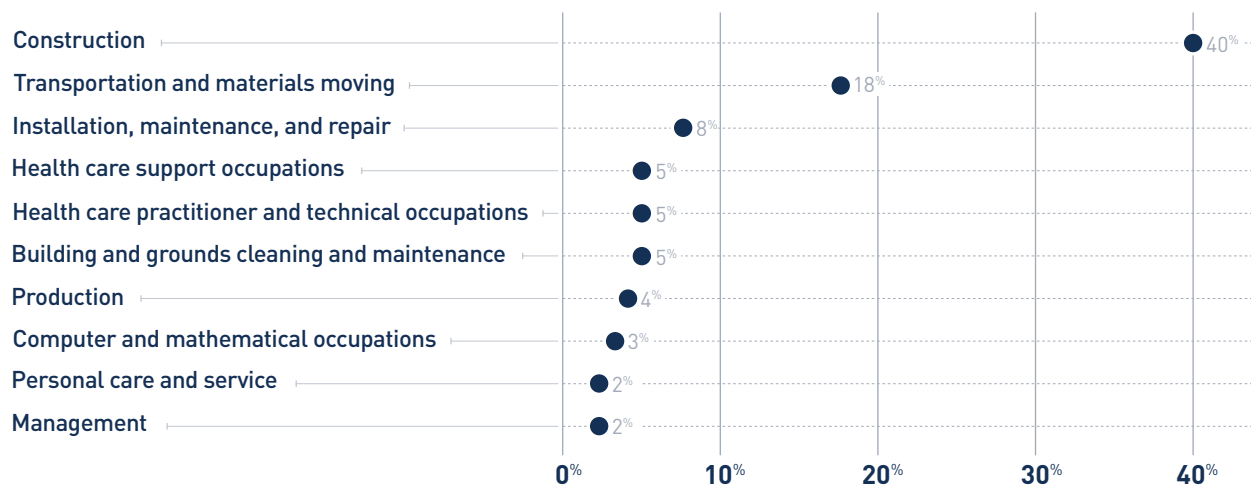
For instance, southern states legislatures are more likely than legislatures in other regions to use preemption to prohibit local governments from setting strong labor standards that could support economic stability for apprentices.¹⁰ Moreover, apprentices in the South earn only 64 cents for every dollar that apprentices in the Western half of the country make upon exit from an apprenticeship program.¹¹

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3 Most Black apprentices work in construction but face exclusion from high-paying roles

Construction is the top occupation for Black registered apprentices. About 40 percent of all Black apprentices are in the construction trades. The construction industry has a long history of overt racial discrimination against Black workers, but anti-discrimination policies have opened the door for more Black workers to enter this industry since the mid-20th century.

Most Black apprentices are in construction



Source: Joint Center analysis of RAPIDS data, U.S. Department of Labor.

The high representation of Black apprentices in construction does not eliminate concerns about ongoing racial exclusion and harassment on the worksite given the history of racism in the industry.¹²

Black men report that they do not receive the informal mentoring on the job site that white men receive and are more likely to be blamed when mistakes are made.¹³ These issues are pronounced for Black women who sit at the intersection of racist and sexist harassment in the construction trades.¹⁴

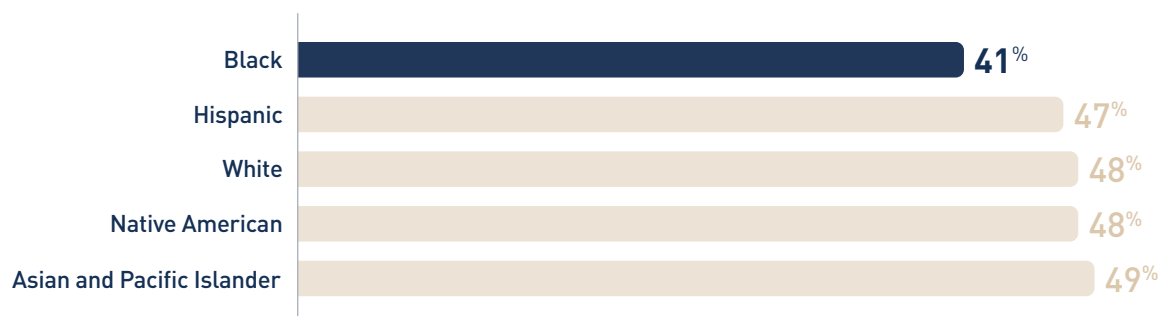
White workers are the most likely to be hired in higher-wage jobs, such as construction managers and supervisors. Just five percent of construction supervisors are Black, while 90 percent are white.

Lastly, employers continue to leave Black journeymen in lower-wage jobs in the industry, while white workers are the most likely to be hired in higher-wage jobs, such as construction managers and supervisors. Just five percent of construction supervisors are Black, while 90 percent are white.¹⁵

4 Black registered apprentices are least likely to complete programs

Registered apprenticeships could serve as a path to high-paying careers for Black apprentices, but many Black apprentices are not completing their programs. In FY 2021, Black workers had the lowest completion rate (41 percent) when compared to Hispanic (47 percent), white (48 percent), Native American (48 percent), and Asian and Pacific Islander (49 percent) apprentices.

Completion rates, FY 2021



Completion rate (%) of apprenticeship cohort who completes within one year of expected completion date.

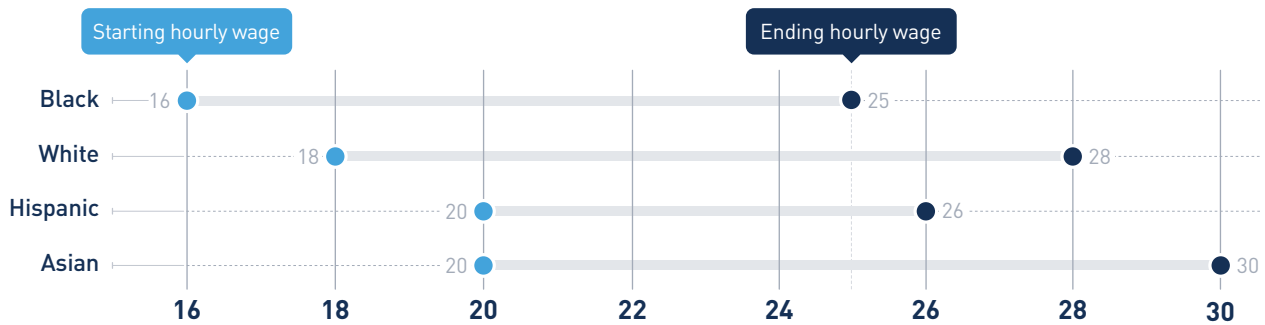
Source: Joint Center analysis of RAPIDS data, U.S. Department of Labor.

According to the limited research available, barriers to completion in apprenticeships are similar to barriers in other career pathways or training opportunities. For instance, lack of supportive services — such as childcare, transportation, and housing assistance — can lower completion rates for underrepresented groups once they are in a program.¹⁶

5 Black apprentices have the lowest earnings

Registered apprenticeships can be a great pathway to increase earnings for Black workers. Earnings gains are well-documented¹⁷, and the “earn-while-you-learn” potential of apprenticeships ensures that participants avoid student debt.¹⁸ Black registered apprentices experience an average \$9 per hour earnings gain from the time they start their apprenticeship program to when they finish. However, Black registered apprentices still begin and end their apprenticeship earning the least when compared to white, Hispanic, and Asian apprentices despite across-the-board earnings gains.

Average starting and ending wages for registered apprentices, by race and ethnicity, FY 2021



Starting and ending hourly wages were provided as an average of wages for each racial category.

Source: Joint Center analysis of RAPIDS data, U.S. Department of Labor.



CONCLUSION

As policymakers make commitments to expand apprenticeship opportunities, they must consider the inequities illuminated in this brief. Additionally, policymakers should pursue the following:

I Establish permanent funding for increasing equity in apprenticeships

Congress should dedicate funding to help states and localities develop new programs to increase the representation of Black workers in traditional and nontraditional apprenticeship occupations. Congress should ensure that this funding is tied to increasing the participation and promotion of Black apprentices and closing the earnings gaps between Black and white apprentices. Organizations that receive public grants and contract funding to expand registered apprenticeship must demonstrate the capacity to meaningfully center equity in their programs even as they strive to meet industry demand.

I Eliminate barriers to entry for people with low incomes

Many registered apprenticeships impose barriers to entry for people with low incomes through high costs for tools, equipment, books, supplies, and uniforms, as well as scheduling inflexibility for parents or commuters. Scheduling barriers are especially problematic for individuals on probation and parole or community supervision. Apprenticeships must provide wraparound services and robust supports to cover the costs of childcare, transportation, housing assistance, and more, which will help apprentices complete their programs.

I Encourage college credit for apprenticeship training

Apprenticeship programs and colleges should coordinate to allow apprentices to apply apprenticeship hours to degree programs. For those students who do not complete their apprenticeship programs, college credit would expand opportunities for credential attainment. College degrees provide apprentices access to opportunities to move ahead in their careers, such as assuming management responsibilities. Apprenticeship sponsors commonly provide discounts on tuition, scholarships, and other forms of subsidy. These arrangements, together with the built-in “earn-while-you-learn” feature of apprenticeships, could make postsecondary education more affordable and accessible to apprentices.

I Develop a national system to track unregistered apprenticeship outcomes

All publicly available data on U.S. apprentices and apprenticeship programs is based on registered apprenticeships through the U.S. Department of Labor. Many nonregistered apprenticeships exist, but no centralized data source tracks them. It is an unknown and unaccountable domain of training that falls outside the scope of nondiscrimination and equity objectives currently required for registration.



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