

INTRODUCTION

America today is striving to maintain its standard of living and its pre-eminent position among the countries of the world. How well it fares in the future will depend in part on today's youth. They will be the leaders and the citizens of the 21st century.

Youth is a period where dramatic physical, emotional, and educational changes take place. Children and adolescents make the transition to adulthood; many leave home, or marry and start families of their own, or attend postsecondary education or begin careers. Couple the demands of these personal changes with the demands of a changing society and it is easy to see why youth might also be defined as a difficult time of life.

While struggling through the passage to maturity, each generation also faces unique challenges. We conduct business in an increasingly competitive global economy. Unprecedented amounts of technology will confront our youth with a continued array of new information. We will need to be comfortable acquiring new knowledge and learning new skills. They will need to address educational and health-related problems and cultural differences in order to deal with economic and societal pressures.

Youth Indicators offers a broad perspective on youth using trend data that cut across disciplines and agency lines. It is intended to be of use to agency officials and others in public life concerned with integrating human services for youth and their families. *Youth Indicators* was created to meet the needs of these policymakers who must establish a context for viewing trends in the well-being of youth. *Youth Indicators* contains statistics that address important aspects of the lives of youth—family, work, education, health, behavior, and attitudes. When taken together, the data create an outline of the conditions under which young people live and help illuminate this period of transitions. Researchers

and policymakers can look at the outline to identify gaps in data where intervention might be beneficial, and where changes might be made. Ideally, these indicators will be used as catalysts for further study and action.

One important objective of the report is to present trends over time, rather than to deliver snapshots of contemporary conditions. Whenever possible, tables go as far back as 1950, or even earlier, providing needed historical context for today's issues. Some indicators cover only more recent years—either because they show key details or because data are simply not available for earlier years. This edition of *Youth Indicators* was designed to highlight information on high school graduates and dropouts entering the workforce and forming families.

Each indicator contains a table, chart, and brief descriptive text. The indicators are grouped in sections that feature particular areas of youth experience. The tables provide current and trend information on a given topic. The charts are designed to highlight the most important aspects of the statistical tables. The text describes critical features of each indicator, showing the types of inferences one might reasonably make. A short glossary defines key technical terms.

These indicators are representative but do not constitute the total body of knowledge about American youth. While the selection of indicators itself is open to debate, the assortment we have collected is intended to be full and fair in its overall portrayal of conditions facing young people. Because new data reveal changes in some of the trends we present, *Youth Indicators* is updated regularly, with the aim of maintaining its usefulness. We invite continuing dialogue with readers about the approaches taken and the indicators selected.

We have organized this introduction according to general themes that are based on

some of the report's most important indicators. While the task of interpretation belongs with the reader, the report includes some comments on the nature and substance of the data. We hope the following passages will serve as reference points against which readers may compare and contrast their own views on the progress of American youth.

HOME

Demographics and Family Composition

Changes in birth rates profoundly influence society for decades as larger or smaller groups (birth cohorts) move through school, adulthood, the workforce, and finally into retirement. Larger birth cohorts can cause pressure for building schools, hiring more teachers, and expanding medical services; reduced cohorts can have the opposite effect. Recent demographic shifts in the youth population have placed great stress on schools, colleges, and the workforce (Indicator #3).

The best-known of these birth cohorts is the "baby boom," the rise in births from the late 1940s through the early 1960s that created a large population bulge. This bulge caused elementary and secondary school enrollment to rise rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, which in turn created a surge in school construction and a demand for hundreds of thousands of new teachers. The boom's aftershock hit in the 1970s when sharply declining birth rates resulted in drops in enrollment that left schools underutilized and sometimes overstaffed. From 1971 to 1984, total elementary and secondary school enrollment decreased every year, reflecting the decline in the school-age population over that period. Meanwhile, the "baby boomers" moved into their twenties, and unprecedented numbers of young people entered the labor market, causing heavy competition for entry-level jobs and depressing wage levels. Many demographers predict that this population bulge will create similar pressures on retire-

ment funds and health care services as members of that birth cohort move into their retirement years. It is worth observing that "baby boomers" will first become eligible to collect Social Security in the first decade of the new century.

Today another major demographic surge is underway. Between 1985 and 1994 public school enrollment in kindergarten through grade eight rose. By 1997, total elementary and secondary enrollments are projected to surpass the previous high set in 1971 and are expected to continue to rise into the next century. This expansion is forcing demand for more teachers, school buildings, and social services. The demographic composition of America's youth is also changing, with projected increases in the minority composition for preschool age children through young adults.

Another long-term demographic trend is that fewer people are getting married and are doing so at a later age than in the recent past. In fact, today's averages exceed the historic highs of the late 19th century. The 1950s were a period of early marriages, and the age of first marriage has risen steadily between 1950 and the 1990s (#3). Despite the decline in marriage rates, however, the United States still has a substantially higher marriage rate than other developed nations. The divorce rate in the United States is also much higher than in other developed nations, although that gap is narrowing (#5).

The structure of families has also changed, with fewer married-couple families containing children. This change reflects both a decline in birth rates among younger families and an increase in the proportion of older married couples who are unlikely to have children under 18. In 1994, fewer than half of white families had children under 18, although the majority of Hispanic and black families did (#10).

Moreover, women are waiting until they are older to bear children. Until 1985, the women aged 20 to 24 had the highest birth rate. Since the late 1980s, 25- to 29-year-old

women have had the highest birth rate. The birth rate for 30- to 34-year-old women has risen by 30 percent since 1980, but is still lower than in 1950 or 1960 (#6). Overall, the birth rate for women 15- to 44-years-old has been stable since 1980. Black women continue to bear children most frequently in their early 20s. Since 1980, birth rates to unmarried women of all ages and races have risen.

Families have grown smaller over the past two decades, a pattern especially notable between 1970 and 1980. Even when single adults and couples have children, they are having fewer of them. Since 1980, the average number of children per family has been less than two (#10 and #11).

A high divorce rate, coupled with nonmarital births, has fed another phenomenon: a rising proportion of children living with only one parent. The proportion of children under 18 living in married-couple families declined by 10 percent between 1970 and 1994, while the proportion living in single-parent families grew (#11). Much of the increase in these figures was driven by increases in the divorce rates during the 1970s, though the divorce rate has been relatively stable since 1980 (#4). In 1994, 25 percent of children lived in single-parent families. The figures for minority children are even higher. In 1994, 59 percent of black children lived in single-parent homes compared with 19 percent of white children and 29 percent of Hispanic children.

These data on children in single parent families represent children's living status during a single year. Many more children are affected over their lifetimes by the impact of divorce. As social science examines the emotional and psychological consequences of single-parent households, the economic consequences are already clear. Single-parent families tend to suffer severe economic disadvantages.

Family Formation

A striking change in the youth experience is an apparent lengthening of the transition pe-

riod from childhood to economic independence. Several symptoms mark this phenomenon. Young adults are more likely to live with their parents. High school completion rates have improved modestly, and more graduates are going to college. Attending college typically results in a higher paying job, but it also delays moving into the work force full-time and entails paying historically high tuition rates. With all its benefits, this expensive lengthening of the education process makes it difficult for young people to become financially independent until they complete their studies. And even when they have full-time jobs, young adults' incomes have not kept pace with those of other age groups.

Prolonged education and economic dependency may contribute to the increasingly older ages at which people now marry and women begin childbearing. During the 1950s and 1960s, the average age of women at first marriage was about 20; between 1975 and 1993 this rose rapidly, reaching an average of 25 (#3). Viewed another way, marriage rates among 18- to 24-year-old women have dropped significantly; that is, the share of women in that population who are currently married is much lower than before 1975. This means that the average age at first marriage for women is now higher than at any point since 1890, when the average age was 22, and such data were first compiled for the United States.

A small proportion of the high school class of 1992¹ had married within 2 years after high school, and significant numbers lived with partners (#61). About 8 percent of the high school graduates from the class of 1992² were married, but another 6 percent were living with partners. About 12 percent of the graduates had become parents 2 years after high school. The dropouts had substantially different experiences with a far higher proportion starting families. Nineteen percent were married, and 14 percent were living with partners. Nearly half of the dropouts were parents, with the young women nearly twice as likely as the men to have become parents.

A majority of the young mothers from the 1992 class¹ had only one child by early 1994, but about 8 percent of the female dropouts had 3 or more children.

Another way of viewing the difficult transition of high school graduates to the more general community is examining their living arrangements. The proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds living with their parents rose from 48 percent in 1980 to 53 percent in 1993 (#14). During the same time period, the proportion of those with families of their own fell from 29 percent to 21 percent.

The pattern is highlighted by the experience of the high school class of 1992¹. About 52 percent of the graduates and 45 percent of the dropouts were living with their parents in 1994, two years after most of the graduates would have finished high school.

Family Income

While the average size of the family has tapered off in recent years, its average income has stabilized. Between 1950 and 1970, median family income as adjusted for inflation rose significantly. Family income has, on average, been stable since 1970 (#16).

Because families are smaller and their incomes have remained stable, American families are slowly growing more affluent on a per capita basis. However, this economic stability for families has been supported by shifts in the labor force status of family members. In particular, families have been affected by the decline in earnings for men and the increase in women's labor force participation.

Real income for all men who worked full time dropped by 5 percent between 1970 and 1982 and then recovered somewhat during the mid 1980s. After 1986, incomes for male full-time workers began falling again, hitting \$31,609 in 1994, about 10 percent lower real income than in 1970 (#20). For young men who worked full time, income has fallen more: annual income for 20- to 24-year-old men in 1994 was 36 percent below what it had been in 1970. On average, young women's in-

comes also dropped between 1970 and 1994; 20- to 24-year-old women lost about 18 percent of their real income. However, for all full-time women workers, incomes rose by about 12 percent during that time. While the gain of women's income relative to men's suggests some improvement in pay equity, the income gap remains large. Women's incomes were only 74 percent as high as male incomes in 1994.

The participation of more family members in the workforce, particularly married women, has served to buttress family incomes in spite of the decline in incomes for males. In 1960, 39 percent of married women in families with children 6 to 17 years old were in the labor force; 62 percent were in 1980, and 75 percent in 1993. (A portion of the increased participation consisted of part-time workers.) Even more dramatic has been the rise in labor force participation of married women with children under 6—from 19 percent in 1960 to 60 percent in 1993 (#19). This increase in employment of women is partially responsible for the stable family income figures. At the same time, with more mothers working outside the home, the pressures on society for better child care and after school activities for older children have increased.

Not all households are financially secure. Female-headed households continue to struggle with poverty, and it is in these households that child poverty is concentrated. In 1993, 53 percent of children under 18 in female-headed households lived in poverty (#21). In contrast, 21 percent of children under 18 in other types of families lived in poverty. Poverty rates were relatively high for minority children. The proportion of poor children coming from female-headed households has risen dramatically, from 24 percent in 1960 to 58 percent in 1994 for all children, and from 29 percent to 82 percent for black children.

The conditions of children in female-headed households are further exacerbated by the fact that absent fathers often do not meet their full financial obligations. In 1993, about half of women awarded child support pay-

ments received their full entitlement (#23). About one-fourth received partial payment, and about one-fourth received no payment. Despite increasing attempts by courts to obtain payments from absent fathers, the percentage of mothers receiving payments has not changed since the early 1980s.

SCHOOL

There were some 63.9 million students enrolled in education institutions in 1994 from the elementary to the college and university levels. Between 1985 and 1994, enrollment rates for 18- to 24-year-olds rose rapidly (#25). The composition of the student body has been gradually changing, with minority populations growing as a proportion of the total population. Between 1975 and 1994, the proportion of white students declined at all school levels, while the proportion of black students grew from 14.5 percent to 16 percent, and that of Hispanic students grew rapidly, rising from 6.5 percent to 13 percent (#27).

A major influence on students' later educational and occupational opportunities is the type of high school program in which they enroll. In 1992, more 17-year-olds reported enrolling in college preparatory and academic programs than had reported enrolling in such programs in 1982. Correspondingly, the number enrolled in vocational education had declined from 27 percent in 1982 to 12 percent in 1992 (#26).

High school completion rates improved during the 1970s and 1980s: black students are staying in school longer, with more completing high school and college. In contrast, there were relatively small increases for whites, and Hispanics completed less school than other groups. Only 9 percent of 25- to 29-year-old Hispanics had completed 4 or more years of college in 1995 as compared with 26 percent of whites (#28).

A much higher proportion of students are completing high school today than in the 1950s. In 1950, barely half (53 percent) of

25- to 29-year-olds had completed high school, and only 8 percent had completed 4 years of college. In 1995, the figures had climbed to 87 percent completing high school and 25 percent completing 4 years of college.

Evidence from the high school class of 1992 shows a keen interest in completing college programs. Large proportions of the 1992 high school seniors aspired to postsecondary education. About one-third of high school seniors aspired to a postgraduate degree in 1992 and another third aspired to a bachelor's degree. Taken together, this means that about 70 percent of 1992 seniors hoped to obtain a bachelor's or higher level degree, compared to 39 percent of the 1982 seniors. Only 5 percent of the 1992 seniors felt that they would complete only high school (#60).

Large proportions of minority and female seniors were interested in obtaining a postgraduate degree. In 1992, about 35 percent of female seniors aspired to graduate degrees compared to 31 percent of male seniors. The increasing draw of women to higher education is not surprising given the trend of the past 20 years toward more women in the workforce. Minority seniors were as likely, or more likely, to aspire to postgraduate degrees as white seniors.

In addition to academic challenges, college students face financial hurdles. The cost of obtaining higher education degrees has skyrocketed, rising 48 percent at public 4-year colleges and 71 percent at private colleges between 1979–80 and 1994–95 after adjustment for inflation (#24). Compared with median family income, charges for students at public 4-year colleges dropped during the 1960s and 1970s, but increased during the 1980s and early 1990s to a level somewhat higher than 1960. Charges for students at private 4-year colleges, as a ratio of median family income, declined slightly during the 1960s and 1970s, but rose rapidly during the 1980s to levels much higher than those of the past 30 years.

Despite high tuition levels, college attendance is at or near an all-time high. Many col-

lege students combine their education with extensive labor force activities. The proportion of full-time college students who are working has increased significantly, from 37 percent in 1974 to 48 percent in 1994. About 85 percent of the part-time 16- to 24-year-old students were employed in 1994. Nearly, 44 percent of the part-time college students worked full time (#67).

Women's participation at all levels of higher education rose rapidly during the 1960s and has continued to increase. In 1959–60, women received 35 percent of all bachelor's degrees and 32 percent of all master's degrees. By 1993–94, about 55 percent of all bachelor's and master's degrees were awarded to women. Moreover, the percentage of doctor's degrees received by women had climbed from 13 percent in 1969–70 to 39 percent in 1993–94 (#32).

Outcomes

It is problematic to judge student achievement during the 1950s and 1960s because we lack appropriate measures. Between 1971 and 1992, reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a test specifically designed to measure national trends, revealed no general improvement in reading performance for 9-year-olds, and small increases for 13- and 17-year-olds. However, increases in the scores of black 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds and Hispanic 17-year-olds suggest improvements were made in the education of minority students. However, the more recent results are less encouraging: the reading achievement between 1988 and 1992 fell among black 17-year-olds and remained stable among Hispanic 17-year-olds (#33). Sizable gaps in test scores between whites and blacks, and between whites and Hispanics still remain. Although performance gaps narrowed somewhat between 1975 and 1988, the gap between blacks and whites widened between 1988 and 1992, and the gap between white and Hispanic students remained about the same.

NAEP science scores, which declined in the 1970s, recovered somewhat between 1977 and 1992. Science scores for 13-year-olds were about the same in 1992 as they were in 1970, but were lower for 17-year-olds (#36). NAEP results in mathematics are more positive, with 9- and 13-year-old students' average mathematics proficiencies significantly higher in 1992 than they had been in 1978 (#35). The 17-year-olds scored about the same in 1992 as in 1978 (#37).

International comparisons provide us with food for thought. In a 1991 international reading assessment, the United States performed in the top group for both 9- and 14-year-olds. However, in an international comparison of mathematics and science performance among 13-year-olds, students from the United States performed at or near the average in science, and below the average in mathematics.

On the whole, 17-year-olds have shown modest improvements in reading between the early 1970s and 1992, no improvement in mathematics during the same time period, and a slight decline in science. Although 17-year-olds of the early 1990s are performing about as well, or better, on mathematics and reading performance assessments as 17-year-olds of the early 1980s, many educators doubt whether current achievement levels are sufficient to ensure American competitiveness in the future.

Out-of-School Experiences

How students spend their out-of-school time affects their success in school as well as their success in life. Some activities support learning; others siphon off valuable time from studies. Some activities enrich students' lives, help prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship, and enhance students' self-image. Researchers continue to investigate the effects of athletic, aesthetic or expressive, and academic extracurricular activities on adolescent development.

In 1992 as in 1980 and 1972, academic clubs, and newspaper and yearbook activities remained popular extracurricular activities (#39). Sports was another popular activity among young adults. In fact, teenagers and young adults were far more likely to participate in many types of sporting activities than older adults. Younger adolescents ages 12 to 17 tended to participate in organized group sports, while older youths ages 18 to 34 were more likely to participate in aerobics, exercise walking, or exercising with equipment (#40).

Many high school students work while going to school. Some students help support their families, others need money for higher education, and still others want more spending money. Two-fifths of high school seniors said they spent most of their earnings on personal items (#43). Black students were more likely to contribute their earnings to meet family expenses than were white students. Seniors planning to attend a 4-year college were more likely to save for their education than other seniors.

Students' employment opportunities appear to fluctuate with the overall economy. Between 1989 and 1993, employment rates declined for 16- to 17-year-olds, especially among black youth (#42). Although employment rates for female students fell between 1989 and 1993, they were still more likely to be employed in 1993 than in 1970. Employment rates for white students were about three times higher than those for black students.

HEALTH

While people live longer than ever before, youths still suffer their share of life-threatening problems. Overall, the number of deaths per 100,000 men 15 to 24 years old fell from 168 in 1950 to 144 in 1993. For young women, the rate fell from 89 to 49 (#50). These drops reflect advances in medicine and disease prevention which resulted in de-

clining death rates from diseases during this time.

Much of the physical threats to youth stem from behavior rather than disease. In 1992, the leading causes of death among 15- to 24-year-olds were motor vehicle accidents, homicide, and suicide (#51). The rate of deaths from homicide and suicide rose between 1960 and 1992. White male suicide rates exceeded those for women or black males. In contrast, the homicide death rate for black males was particularly high. Between 1985 and 1992 the homicide death rate for black males rose from 66 to 154 per 100,000. This rate is many times the rates for white males or black or white females. Motor vehicle accidents continue to be the leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds, although the rate has been declining in recent years and is lower now than in 1960. Homicides are now the second leading cause of death for young adults.

Health care often depends on the availability of health insurance. In 1993, about 68 percent of children under 18 were covered by some type of private health insurance (#45). An additional 24 percent were covered by Medicaid. Lower proportions of 18- to 24-year-olds were covered by private health insurance (62 percent) and Medicaid (12 percent).

Illegal drugs remain a problem for youth. Although the proportion of high school seniors who reported having ever used illegal drugs fell from 55 percent in 1975 to 41 percent in 1992, there was a significant increase between 1992 and 1994 (#49). The proportion who had ever used illegal drugs increased to 46 percent and the proportion who had used drugs in the previous 30 days rose from 14 percent to 22 percent. Alcohol continues to be the most popular substance with 80 percent of seniors in 1994 reporting using or "having used" it. Alcohol is followed in popularity by cigarettes (62 percent) and marijuana/hashish (38 percent).

CITIZENSHIP AND VALUES

How are American young people developing as citizens? Many youths volunteer for school and other organizations, and their proportions have grown in recent years. After declining during the 1980s, the proportion of seniors who participated in volunteer activities at least once per month rose from 22 percent in 1990 to 28 percent in 1994 (#53).

Religion is becoming less important in the lives of some youth. The proportion who felt that religion was important in their lives dropped from 65 percent in 1980 to 58 percent in 1994 (#54). A smaller proportion of high school seniors reported attending religious services every week in 1994 than in 1980—32 and 43 percent respectively.

Young adults continue to believe in the value of work, family, and friends. Young people two years out of high school in 1994 placed more value on finding steady work and providing better opportunities for their children than their counterparts 10 years earlier. In contrast to earlier decades, there was no significant difference in the proportion of men and women feeling that “being successful in work” was very important (#55).

On the less positive side, crime among young people has been on the rise. In 1993, about 45 percent of those arrested for serious crimes were under 25 years old. The number of arrests per 1,000 young adults 18 to 24 years old more than doubled between 1965 and 1993, but most of the increase was between 1965 and 1980 (#59).

FUTURE

Income of Youth

Youth should be a time of optimism and anticipation. Student aspirations and their modifications over time are intriguing topics for researchers. As youth consider their future economic prospects, the importance of postsecondary education becomes apparent.

Clearly, education adds to future earning power.

There have been substantial declines in the earnings of 25- to 34-year-old males. Among male dropouts, the average earnings for 1993 were worth about half of what they were in 1970. There were also very large drops for males with 4 years of high school and those with some college. Although the earnings for the male college graduates did not decline at such a fast rate, they were still earning only about as much as high school graduates in 1970. As a result of these shifts, the earnings disparity by level of education widened considerably. In 1970, dropouts earned about 16 percent less than high school graduates and those with 4 years of college earned about 24 percent more than the high school graduates. By 1993, dropouts earned 33 percent less than the high school graduates, and college graduates about 57 percent more than the high school graduates (#69).

The experience for women has been similar, although the drops in earnings have not been as severe. Earnings for women with college degrees remained fairly steady throughout the period. As a result, the disparity in men's and women's earnings narrowed somewhat.

Transitions to the Labor Force: Examples from the Class of 1992¹

The entry of high school graduates and dropouts into the workforce appears to be a difficult transition. After leaving school, high school graduates, and especially their peers who dropped out, had high rates of part-year employment and relatively low earnings. About 34 percent of the high school graduates of the class of 1992² were involved exclusively in labor force activities in 1994, about 2 years after high school (#61). Another 33 percent were in the labor force and attending postsecondary education. About 22 percent were attending college and not working. Others were serving in the military or were working as homemakers. Dropouts and

other noncompleters³ were less likely to be enrolled in college or serving in the military, but more likely to be homemakers than the graduates.

Unemployment rates for 16- to 19-year-olds and 20- to 24-year-olds historically have been high, but these data do not adequately describe the problems many individuals face in finding steady employment. Even those who found jobs frequently faced intermittent employment. Less than three-fourths of the 1992 high school graduates,² who were not attending school and worked during 1993, were employed for 10 or more months (#66). About 61 percent of the employed dropouts³ from their high school class worked 10 or more months. About 1/4 of the dropouts employed during the year worked half of the year or less. Of the black dropouts who were able to find jobs, 41 percent worked half of the year or less.

Some graduates² and dropouts³ had no job experiences at all. About 4 percent of the male graduates from the class of 1992 reported no job in the 2-year period between summer 1992 and spring 1994. About 10 percent of the male dropouts from the same class cohort had no job experiences during the 2-year-period. The problem was acute for some minority groups. About 12 percent of black high school graduates and 23 percent of American Indian graduates had no jobs over the 2-year period. Among black and Hispanic dropouts, about 27 percent had no job over the 2-year period.

In contrast, some workers from the class of 1992 had a relatively large number of jobs in a short period of time, sometimes referred to as "job churning." About 26 percent of the graduates had 5 to 9 jobs in about 2 years and 1 percent had 10 or more jobs. About half of the graduates worked at 3 or 4 jobs over the same time period. Slightly smaller proportions of dropouts also had frequent job changes.

The workers from the class of 1992 had mixed feelings about their jobs. Most were at least "somewhat satisfied" about such issues

as pay, job challenge, job security, and working conditions. For example, about 77 percent of the high school graduates who were not enrolled in postsecondary education were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their job's pay and benefits (#56). However, only 26 percent were "very satisfied" and 51 percent were "somewhat satisfied." The dropouts who had jobs expressed roughly similar satisfaction levels with 72 percent expressing at least some satisfaction with their job's pay. Relatively high dissatisfaction levels were expressed for job's "opportunity for promotion" and "opportunity to further your education." About 42 percent of the dropouts and 35 percent of the graduates were dissatisfied with their job's "opportunity for promotion and advancement." In many of the job satisfaction measures, the differences in the opinions of the graduates and dropouts were not large.

As might be expected from the trend data presented on declining earnings for young adults, high unemployment levels, and frequent job changes, earnings for the high school class of 1992 were modest. Contributing to the low earnings may have been large proportions of young workers with minimum wage jobs and significant periods of unemployment. The average annual 1993 earnings for the graduates of the class of 1992² who were not enrolled in school and who had some earnings that year was \$9,421, slightly more than a year of full-time work at minimum wage. The comparable figure for dropouts³ was \$7,840 (#65).

The distribution of earnings shows that a sizeable proportion of graduates, and most dropouts, were clustered at very low earning levels. About 17 percent of 1992 graduates² not enrolled in college had no earnings in 1993 and another 23 percent earned less than \$5,000. Among dropouts,³ 33 percent had no earnings in 1993 and another 25 percent earned less than \$5,000. The proportion of females and blacks with no or low earnings was substantially higher than the proportions for males and whites, respectively, among

both dropouts and high school graduates not enrolled in college.

Trend data on employment rates suggest that the experiences of the high school class of 1992 were typical of the recent past in terms of unemployment rates. The deterioration of earning power over time is well documented and exemplified by the large proportions of graduates and dropouts from the class of 1992 in low wage and part-year jobs.

FINAL NOTES

On the previous pages we have tried to present the data in our charts and tables without interpreting them, limiting our narrative to illustration. We recognize it is never possible to succeed at this effort—as some of our most supportive critics point out, the mere selection of data and time periods suggests some interpretation. We wish, therefore, to be judged on the basis of our success at being evenhanded and at fueling in others the desire to examine and interpret the information in this book.

We recognize that this book does not report on many important dimensions of young peoples' lives. For some issues we have been unable to find reliable data. Complete

information on child abuse, runaways, and drug-addicted babies, for example, are of considerable public interest but difficult to obtain or verify. Indicators of more subjective measures of human lives are also hard to discover.

We would like to think that the indicators that follow capture the important features of American youth. But we know how much more is left to be done. So our more modest goal is to sketch an outline others might fill in and suggest connections that others might develop. While this endeavor may inspire yet more questions, we trust it has also answered a few.

¹References to the class of 1992 are based on students who were 8th graders in 1988 and who would be expected to have graduated in 1992. This group includes students who did not complete high school until later years or persons who dropped out sometime during the 1988 to 1994 period. Data based on the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.

²Includes regular "on-time" graduates as well as those who graduated after spring 1992, but before spring 1994, through regular or alternative education programs or GED certification. Data based on the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.

³Includes persons who dropped out after 8th grade and did not complete a GED or high school equivalency program by 1994. Also includes some students who were still enrolled or returned to high school, but had not obtained their diploma by spring 1994. Data based on the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.