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The Decline in African-American Representation in Unions and Auto Manufacturing, 1979-2004

BY JOHN SCHMITT AND BEN ZIPPERER

Summary

- Between 1983 and 2004, the share of African-American workers who were either members of a union or represented by a union at their place of employment fell substantially, from 31.7 percent of all black workers in 1983 to 16.6 percent in 2004. In 2004, African-Americans were still more likely to be in a union (16.6 percent) than whites (13.9) and Hispanics (11.4 percent). Nevertheless, the decline in union membership for black workers between 1983 and 2004 was sharper for blacks (down 15.1 percentage points) than it was for whites (down 8.3 percentage points) and Hispanics (down 12.8 percentage points). (See Table 1.)
- Between 1979 and 2004, the share of African Americans working in manufacturing declined from 23.9 percent in 1979 to 10.6 percent in 2004. Whites saw slightly smaller declines (from 23.5 percent to 12.1 percent), while Hispanics experienced a bigger drop off (from 30.2 percent to 13.7 percent). (See Table 2.)
- Between 1979 and 2004, the share of workers in auto manufacturing dropped for blacks, whites, and Hispanics. Blacks suffered the biggest declines –a 0.8 percentage-point decline, from 2.1 percentage points in 1979 to 1.3 percentage points in 2004-- compared to a 0.2 percentage point drop for whites and Hispanics. (See Table 3.)
- Throughout the entire 1983-2004 period, black workers have represented 13-15 percent of all union workers. Over the same period, the share of whites in the total union workforce fell from 78.1 percent to 70.1 percent, and the share of Hispanics rose from 5.8 percent to 11.0 percent of all union workers. (See Table 4.)
- Throughout the entire period from 1979 to 2004, the share of African-American workers in the total manufacturing workforce hovered around 10 percent. Meanwhile, the share of white workers fell from 82.1 percent of all manufacturing workers in 1979 to 69.5 percent in 2004. Hispanics (and other

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workers) increased their representation in the manufacturing workforce over the same period (up from 6.1 percent of manufacturing jobs in 1979 to 14.6 percent in 2004, for Hispanics). (See Table 5.)

- In 2004, blacks made up 14.5 percent of the auto manufacturing workforce; whites were 73.3 percent; Hispanics, 7.5 percent. Between 1979 and 2004, the share of blacks and whites in the total auto manufacturing workforce both fell. The share of Hispanic and other workers, meanwhile, increased, although remained at relatively low levels. (See Table 6.)
- Interpreting the preceding changes in the distribution of African-American employment and unionization rates can be complicated since the share of African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups in the total workforce has changed over time. Tables 8, 9, and 10 show the "relative representation" of whites, blacks, and Hispanics in the total union workforce (Table 8), the total manufacturing workforce (Table 9), and the auto manufacturing workforce (Table 10). The simplest way to explain the calculation is with an example. To calculate the relative representation of African Americans in the share of all union workers, we take the ratio of the share of African Americans in all union workers (13.5 percent in 2004, in Table 4) to the share of African Americans in the total workforce (10.6 percent in 2004, in Table 7). The resulting ratio is 1.27, which is greater than 1, indicates that African Americans are "over-represented" among union workers since there is a larger share of African Americans in unions than there is in the workforce as a whole. In the same year, Hispanics made up 11.0 percent of union workers, but 12.9 percent of the total workforce, resulting in a relative representation of 0.85, which is less than 1, indicating that Hispanics are "under-represented" among union workers. If a group has the same share of workers in unions as they do in the total workforce, then the ratio for relative representation would equal one (which is close to the rate for whites in 2004, 0.99).
- In 2004, African-American workers were "over-represented" in unions (Table 8) and in auto manufacturing (Table 10), but are actually "under-represented" in manufacturing as a whole (Table 9).
- The relative representation of African Americans has been steadily declining in unions (Table 8), manufacturing (from the mid-1990s, Table 9), and auto manufacturing (Table 10). From the mid-1990s on, black workers have actually been under-represented in manufacturing, relative to the rest of the economy (Table 9). Meanwhile, white workers have held their ground in manufacturing (Table 9), and have actually increased their relative representation in unions (Table 8) and auto manufacturing (Table 10).

Data Appendix

All data are from the CEPR uniform extracts of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. For full details, see http://www.ceprdata.org/.

TABLE 1

Share of workers in unions, by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	--	--	--
1980	--	--	--
1981	--	--	--
1982	--	--	--
1983	31.7	22.2	24.2
1984	29.2	20.5	22.8
1985	27.3	19.5	21.3
1986	26.6	19.0	20.0
1987	25.3	18.4	19.1
1988	25.9	18.1	17.8
1989	25.2	17.8	16.9
1990	24.2	17.7	16.5
1991	24.1	17.4	17.6
1992	24.0	17.1	16.9
1993	23.6	17.1	16.6
1994	22.9	16.8	15.9
1995	22.2	16.1	14.8
1996	21.2	15.8	14.6
1997	20.1	15.4	13.5
1998	19.7	15.1	13.2
1999	19.2	15.1	13.1
2000	18.9	14.7	12.8
2001	18.7	14.7	12.5
2002	18.8	14.4	12.0
2003	18.2	14.2	12.0
2004	16.6	13.9	11.4

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. Union workers are either members of a union or covered by a collective-bargaining agreement.

TABLE 2

Share of workers in manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(percent)

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	23.9	23.5	30.2
1980	22.8	22.9	28.9
1981	22.8	22.5	28.5
1982	20.8	21.2	26.7
1983	20.6	20.5	23.8
1984	21.2	20.7	24.4
1985	20.2	20.1	25.3
1986	19.9	19.7	24.0
1987	19.3	19.1	23.0
1988	18.7	19.0	22.1
1989	18.5	18.8	22.0
1990	18.4	18.4	21.7
1991	18.1	17.9	20.3
1992	17.7	17.3	19.8
1993	16.5	16.8	19.4
1994	16.2	16.8	19.3
1995	16.2	16.8	19.2
1996	16.0	16.5	18.1
1997	15.6	16.2	18.6
1998	14.9	16.0	17.7
1999	14.5	15.4	16.9
2000	13.6	15.0	17.1
2001	12.5	14.3	16.4
2002	12.0	13.5	14.8
2003	10.9	12.5	14.0
2004	10.6	12.1	13.7

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

TABLE 3

Share of workers in auto manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(percent)

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	2.1	1.3	0.8
1980	1.3	1.0	0.6
1981	1.5	1.0	0.5
1982	1.2	0.8	0.4
1983	1.5	1.0	0.6
1984	1.9	1.1	0.8
1985	1.6	1.1	0.8
1986	1.7	1.1	0.8
1987	1.3	1.0	0.9
1988	1.5	1.0	0.7
1989	1.5	1.0	0.6
1990	1.3	1.0	0.6
1991	1.2	0.9	0.6
1992	1.3	1.0	0.6
1993	1.2	1.0	0.6
1994	1.4	1.0	0.6
1995	1.2	1.0	0.6
1996	1.4	1.0	0.5
1997	1.5	1.0	0.5
1998	1.2	1.0	0.7
1999	1.3	1.0	0.5
2000	1.3	1.0	0.5
2001	1.1	0.9	0.5
2002	1.1	0.9	0.5
2003	1.3	1.1	0.5
2004	1.3	1.1	0.6

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. Auto workers defined as those in "Motor Vehicle and Equipment Manufacturing."

TABLE 4

Distribution of union workers by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004

(percent)

	Share of union workers who are:		
	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	--	--	--
1980	--	--	--
1981	--	--	--
1982	--	--	--
1983	13.7	78.1	5.8
1984	14.1	77.3	6.1
1985	14.1	76.5	6.9
1986	14.1	76.2	6.9
1987	14.2	75.8	7.2
1988	14.8	75.2	7.1
1989	14.9	75.2	6.9
1990	14.3	75.6	7.1
1991	14.4	74.7	7.7
1992	14.6	74.6	7.6
1993	14.6	74.9	7.7
1994	14.7	73.6	8.4
1995	15.1	73.5	8.4
1996	14.7	73.1	8.7
1997	14.6	72.8	8.9
1998	14.9	72.2	9.1
1999	14.7	72.1	9.3
2000	14.9	71.5	9.7
2001	14.7	71.6	9.7
2002	14.9	71.4	9.5
2003	14.4	69.3	11.1
2004	13.5	70.1	11.0

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. Union workers are either members of a union or covered by a collective-bargaining agreement.

TABLE 5

Distribution of manufacturing workers by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(percent)

	Share of manufacturing workers who are:		
	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	9.9	82.1	6.1
1980	9.9	81.5	6.5
1981	10.0	81.0	6.8
1982	10.0	81.1	6.7
1983	10.2	80.9	6.2
1984	10.2	80.6	6.5
1985	10.1	79.2	8.0
1986	10.2	78.8	8.2
1987	10.3	78.2	8.3
1988	10.3	78.3	8.5
1989	10.2	78.0	8.7
1990	10.5	77.6	8.9
1991	10.5	77.3	8.9
1992	10.7	76.8	9.1
1993	10.4	76.9	9.3
1994	10.2	75.9	10.5
1995	10.4	76.0	10.5
1996	10.5	74.7	10.3
1997	10.5	73.2	11.4
1998	10.4	73.5	11.3
1999	10.6	73.2	11.4
2000	10.2	72.4	12.3
2001	9.9	72.4	12.4
2002	10.2	72.2	12.4
2003	9.7	69.5	14.2
2004	9.7	69.5	14.6

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

TABLE 6

Distribution of auto workers by race or ethnicity

(percent)

	Share of motor vehicle workers who are:		
	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	17.0	79.4	2.9
1980	15.4	80.6	3.1
1981	15.4	80.4	3.2
1982	16.5	79.9	2.7
1983	16.6	78.6	3.5
1984	15.9	79.2	3.6
1985	14.3	80.2	4.2
1986	15.2	78.9	4.6
1987	14.0	78.7	5.7
1988	14.5	79.1	5.0
1989	15.9	78.8	3.8
1990	14.2	79.9	4.4
1991	13.6	79.9	4.9
1992	14.0	79.7	4.8
1993	13.5	79.7	5.1
1994	14.3	77.2	5.6
1995	13.0	79.3	5.8
1996	15.0	76.8	4.7
1997	15.9	76.0	4.7
1998	14.0	75.4	7.2
1999	14.6	76.7	6.0
2000	15.1	76.4	5.7
2001	15.3	75.1	6.0
2002	14.3	75.5	6.3
2003	14.5	74.8	6.5
2004	14.5	73.3	7.5

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. Auto workers defined as those in "Motor Vehicle and Equipment Manufacturing."

TABLE 7

Distribution of total workforce by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(percent)

	Share of all workers who are:		
	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	9.4	83.7	4.7
1980	9.3	83.4	5.1
1981	9.2	83.2	5.3
1982	9.1	83.3	5.2
1983	9.2	83.0	5.2
1984	9.5	82.5	5.4
1985	9.7	81.4	6.3
1986	9.7	80.9	6.6
1987	9.9	80.3	6.9
1988	10.0	79.9	7.2
1989	10.0	79.6	7.3
1990	10.0	79.4	7.5
1991	10.0	79.3	7.5
1992	10.0	79.0	7.6
1993	10.0	78.9	7.8
1994	10.3	77.7	8.8
1995	10.5	77.6	8.9
1996	10.5	76.3	9.2
1997	10.5	75.4	9.8
1998	10.8	74.8	10.1
1999	10.9	74.4	10.3
2000	11.0	73.7	10.7
2001	11.0	73.4	10.9
2002	10.9	73.3	11.1
2003	10.6	71.1	12.7
2004	10.6	70.8	12.9

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

TABLE 8

Relative representation in union workforce, by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004

(Representation among unions / representation total workforce)

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	--	--	--
1980	--	--	--
1981	--	--	--
1982	--	--	--
1983	1.49	0.94	1.12
1984	1.48	0.94	1.13
1985	1.45	0.94	1.10
1986	1.45	0.94	1.05
1987	1.43	0.94	1.04
1988	1.48	0.94	0.99
1989	1.49	0.94	0.95
1990	1.43	0.95	0.95
1991	1.44	0.94	1.03
1992	1.46	0.94	1.00
1993	1.46	0.95	0.99
1994	1.43	0.95	0.95
1995	1.44	0.95	0.94
1996	1.40	0.96	0.95
1997	1.39	0.97	0.91
1998	1.38	0.97	0.90
1999	1.35	0.97	0.90
2000	1.35	0.97	0.91
2001	1.34	0.98	0.89
2002	1.37	0.97	0.86
2003	1.36	0.97	0.87
2004	1.27	0.99	0.85

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

TABLE 9

Relative representation in manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(Representation among manufacturing workers / representation total workforce)

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	1.05	0.98	1.30
1980	1.06	0.98	1.27
1981	1.09	0.97	1.28
1982	1.10	0.97	1.29
1983	1.11	0.97	1.19
1984	1.07	0.98	1.20
1985	1.04	0.97	1.27
1986	1.05	0.97	1.24
1987	1.04	0.97	1.20
1988	1.03	0.98	1.18
1989	1.02	0.98	1.19
1990	1.05	0.98	1.19
1991	1.05	0.97	1.19
1992	1.07	0.97	1.20
1993	1.04	0.97	1.19
1994	0.99	0.98	1.19
1995	0.99	0.98	1.18
1996	1.00	0.98	1.12
1997	1.00	0.97	1.16
1998	0.96	0.98	1.12
1999	0.97	0.98	1.11
2000	0.93	0.98	1.15
2001	0.90	0.99	1.14
2002	0.94	0.98	1.12
2003	0.92	0.98	1.12
2004	0.92	0.98	1.13

Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

TABLE 10

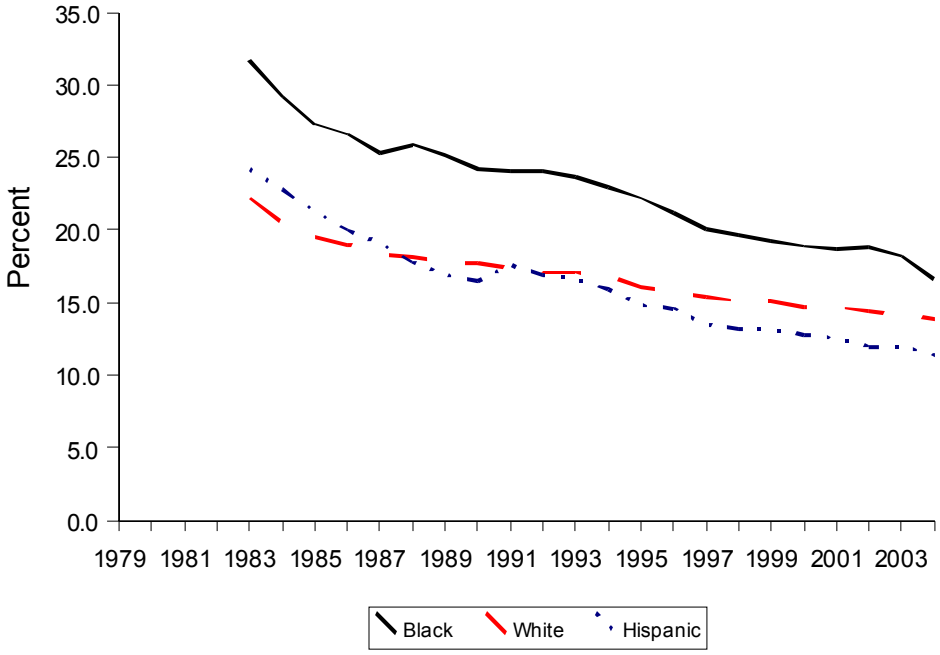
Relative representation in auto manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004

(Representation among auto workers / representation in total workforce)

	Black	White	Hispanic
1979	1.81	0.95	0.62
1980	1.66	0.97	0.61
1981	1.67	0.97	0.60
1982	1.81	0.96	0.52
1983	1.80	0.95	0.67
1984	1.67	0.96	0.67
1985	1.47	0.99	0.67
1986	1.57	0.98	0.70
1987	1.41	0.98	0.83
1988	1.45	0.99	0.69
1989	1.59	0.99	0.52
1990	1.42	1.01	0.59
1991	1.36	1.01	0.65
1992	1.40	1.01	0.63
1993	1.35	1.01	0.65
1994	1.39	0.99	0.64
1995	1.24	1.02	0.65
1996	1.43	1.01	0.51
1997	1.51	1.01	0.48
1998	1.30	1.01	0.71
1999	1.34	1.03	0.58
2000	1.37	1.04	0.53
2001	1.39	1.02	0.55
2002	1.31	1.03	0.57
2003	1.37	1.05	0.51
2004	1.37	1.04	0.58

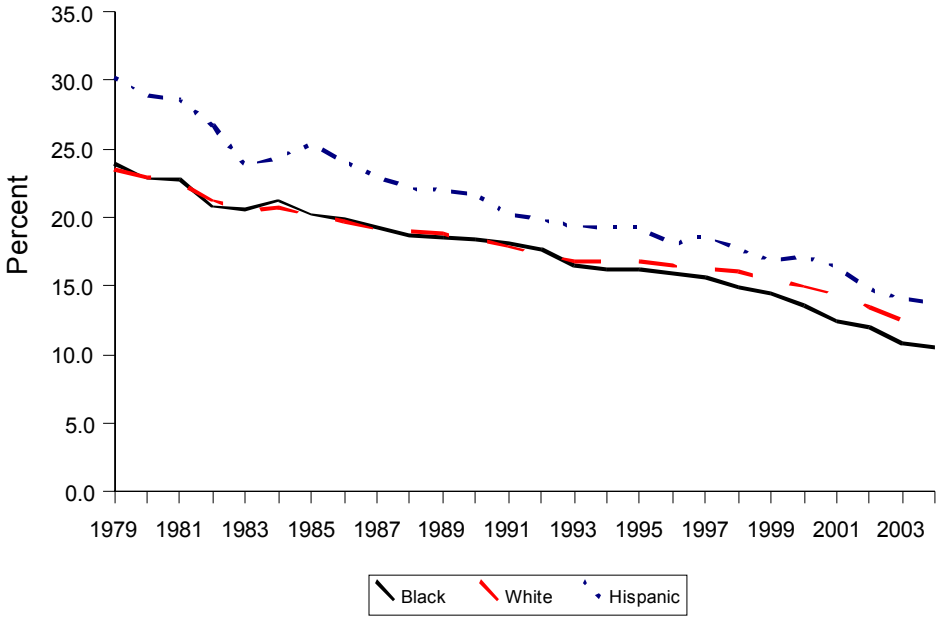
Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

Figure 1: Share of workers in unions, by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004



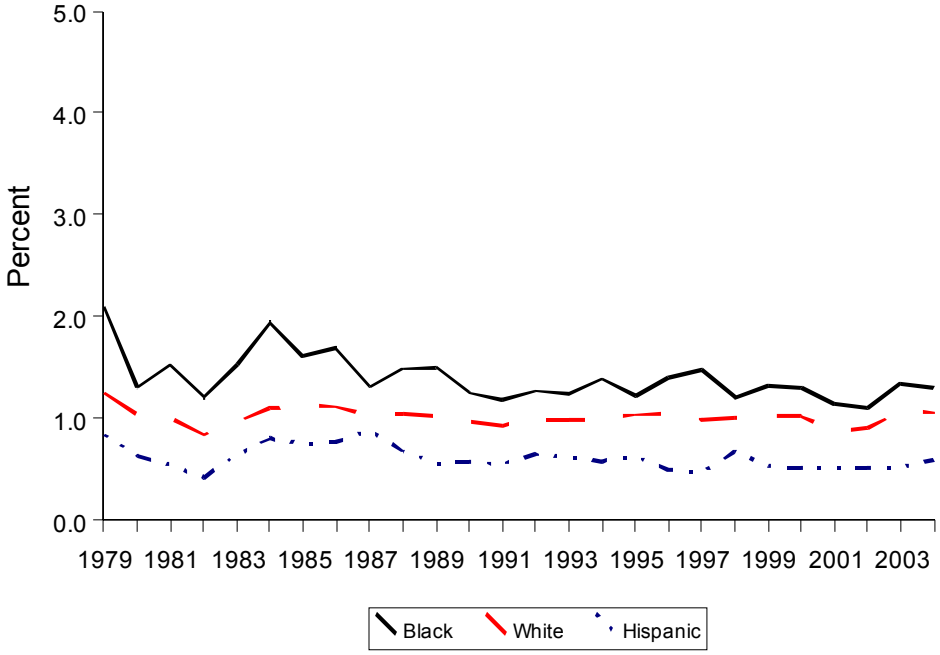
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 2: Share of workers in manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



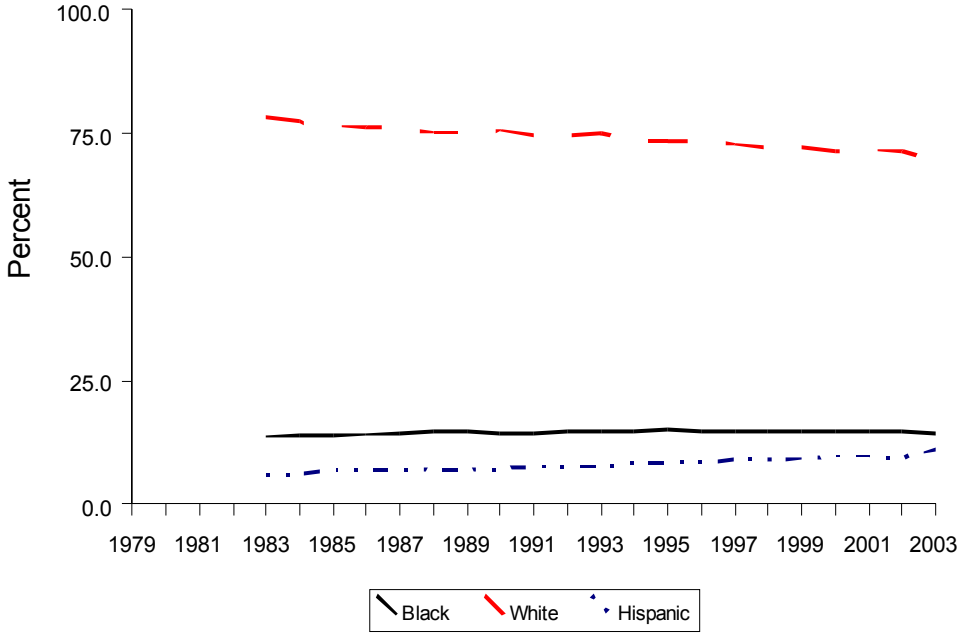
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 3: Share of workers in auto manufacturing, by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



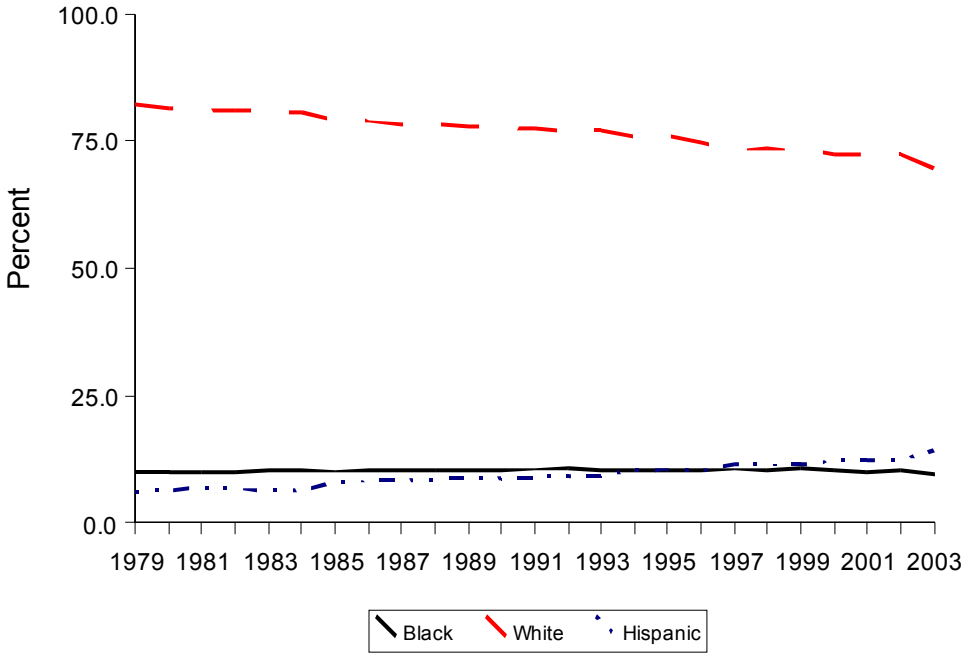
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 4: Distribution of union workers by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004



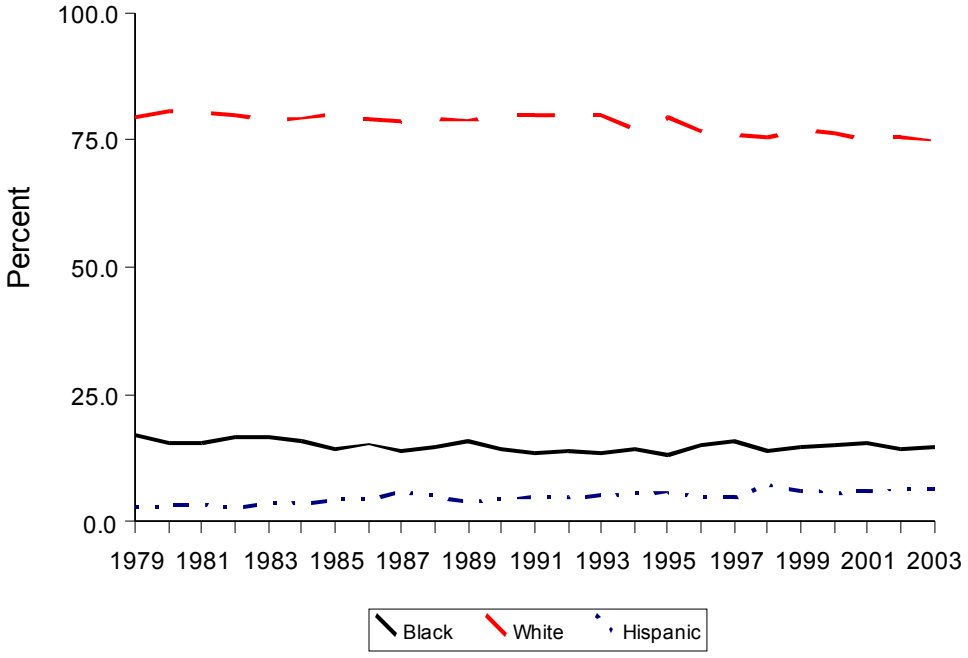
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 5: Distribution of manufacturing workers by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



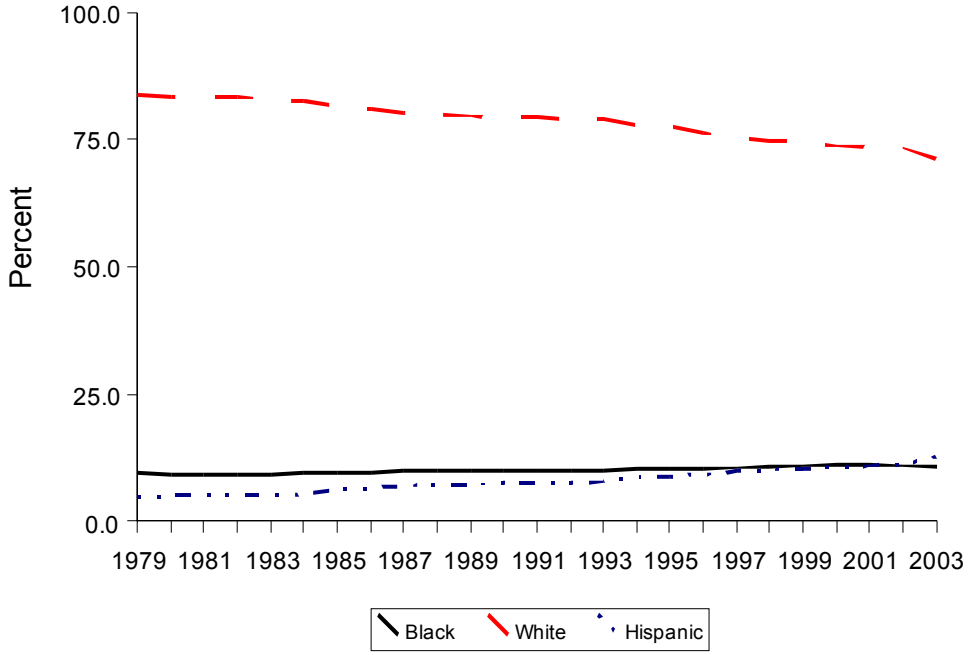
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 6: Distribution of auto workers by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



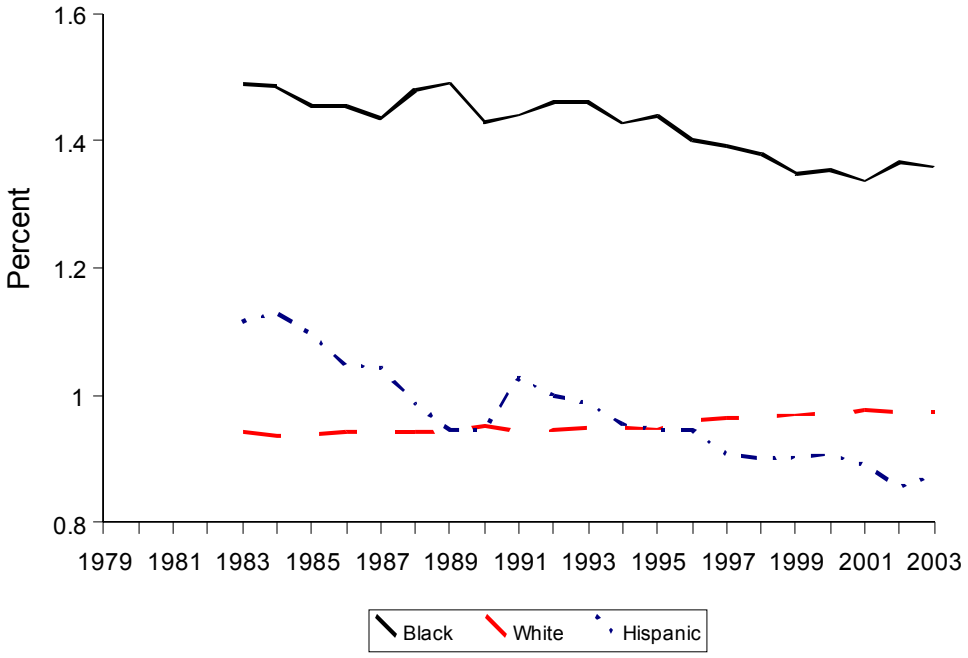
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 7: Distribution of total workforce by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



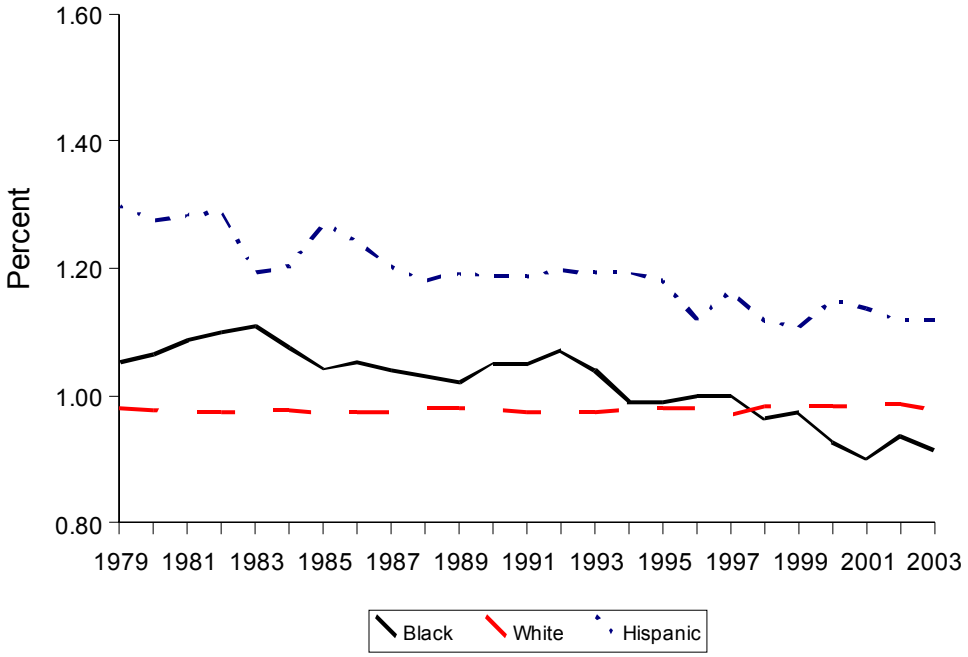
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 8: Relative representation in unions by race or ethnicity, 1983-2004



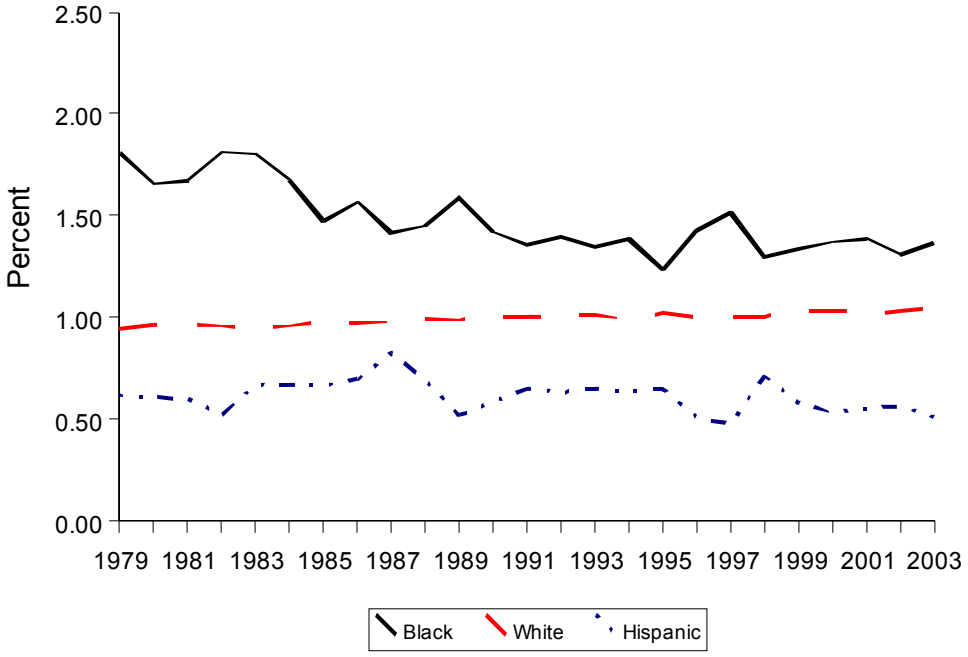
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 9: Relative representation in manufacturing by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.

Figure 10: Relative representation in autos by race or ethnicity, 1979-2004



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey.